MARVEL

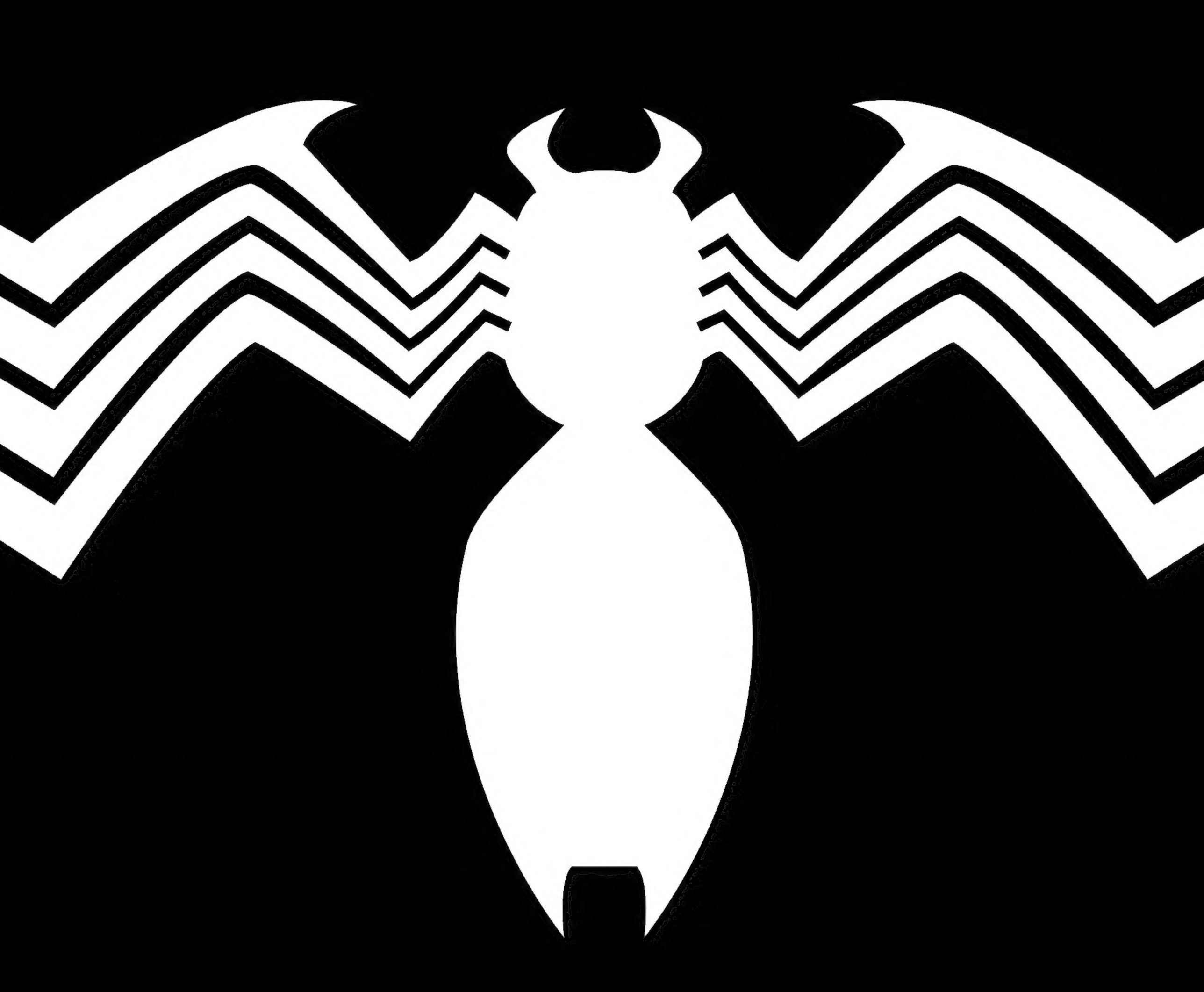
SPIDER-MAN®

BACK IN BLACK

STRACZYNSKI • DAVID • GARNEY • NAUCK

ANGEL MEDINA ¡SOTO!

SPIDER-MAN



BACK IN BLACK

SPIDER-MAN

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AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

WRITER: *J. Michael Straczynski*
PENCILER: *Ron Garney*
INKER: *Bill Reinhold*
COLORIST: *Matt Milla*
LETTERER: *Virtual Calligraphy's Cory Petit*
COVER ARTISTS: *Ron Garney & Matt Milla*
ASSISTANT EDITORS: *Daniel Ketchum & Michael O'Connor*
EDITOR: *Axel Alonso*

FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD SPIDER-MAN

WRITER: *Peter David*
PENCILER: *Todd Nauck*
INKER: *Robert Campanella*
COLORIST: *John Kalisz*
LETTERER: *Virtual Calligraphy's Cory Petit*

"SANDMAN: YEAR ONE"

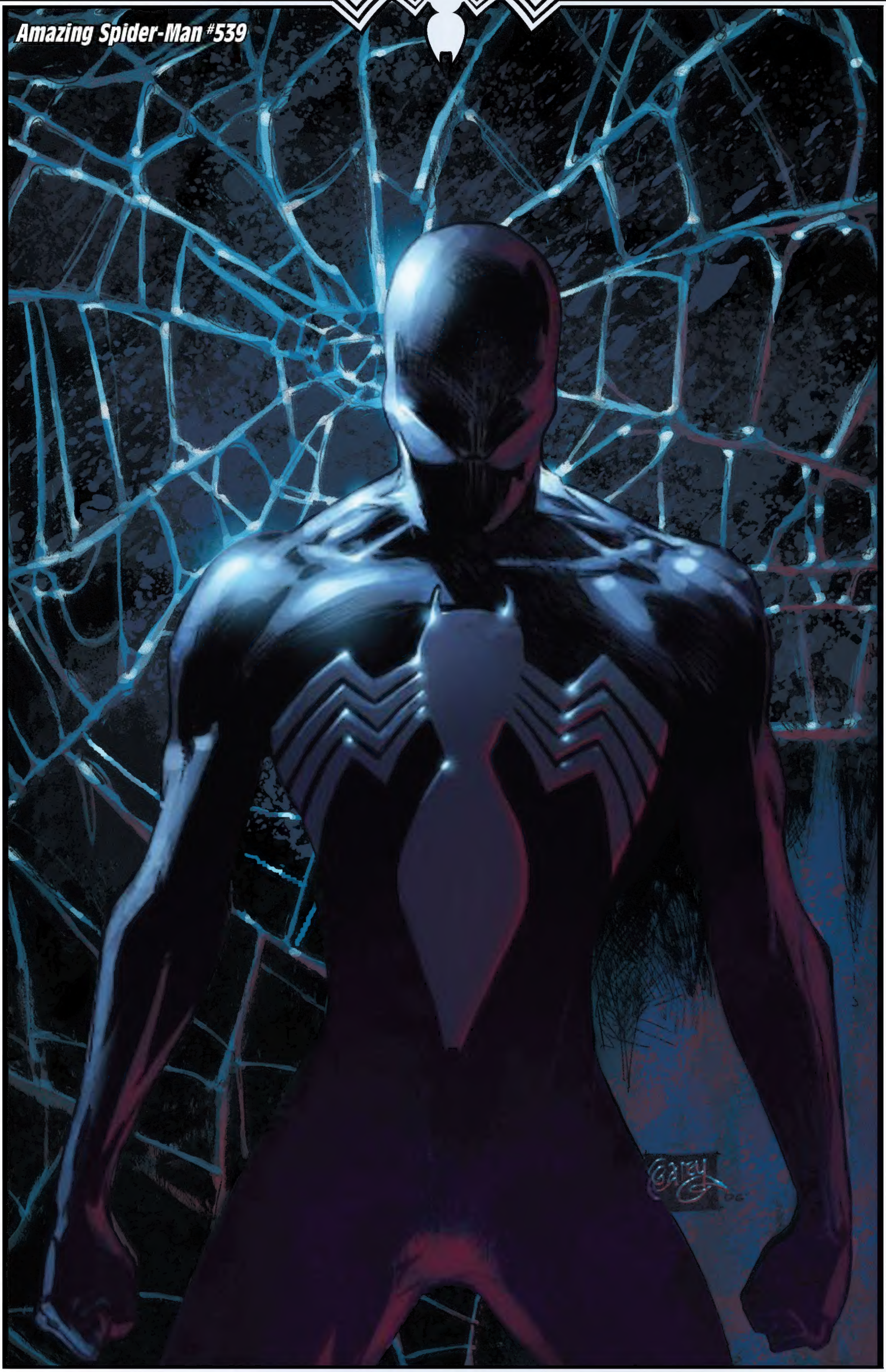
PENCILER: *Ronan Cliquet*
INKER: *Rob Stull*
COLORIST: *John Kalisz*
LETTERER: *Virtual Calligraphy's Cory Petit*

"LEAH"

ARTIST: *Colleen Doran*
COLORIST: *Jose Villarrubia*
LETTERER: *Todd Klein*

COVER ARTISTS: *Mike Wieringo, Todd Nauck, Rob Stull, Tomm Coker, Barry Kitson & Paolo Rivera*
ASSISTANT EDITORS: *Aubrey Sitterson, Thomas Brennan & Molly Lazer*
EDITOR: *Stephen Wacker*
BOOK COVER: *Angel Medina, Scott Hanna & Chris Sotomayor*
Special Thanks to Mike Fichera

COLLECTION EDITOR: *Cory Levine*
ASSISTANT EDITOR: *John Denning*
EDITORS, SPECIAL PROJECTS: *Jennifer Grünwald & Mark D. Beazley*
SENIOR EDITOR, SPECIAL PROJECTS: *Jeff Youngquist*
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES: *David Gabriel*
PRODUCTION: *Jerry Kalinowski*
DESIGNER: *Patrick McGrath*
VICE PRESIDENT OF CREATIVE: *Tom Marvelli*
DIGITAL MANAGER/PRODUCTION: *Tim Smith 3*
DIGITAL PRODUCTION: *Jackeline Tejada*
EDITOR IN CHIEF: *C.B. Cebulski*
CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER: *Joe Quesada*
PRESIDENT: *Dan Buckley*
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: *Alan Fine*


Amazing Spider-Man #539
GALEY

AUNT MAY!

NO!

--OGOD OGOD OGOD--

BACK IN BLACK

PART 1 OF 5

NO...NO MORE--

--NO MORE--

NO MORE!

NO MORE!

JEEP

JEEP

HUSTLER

911... HAVE TO DIAL 911...

HAVE TO--

NO TIME... SHE'LL BE DEAD BY THE TIME THEY GET HERE--

NO TIME!

...PETER...

HANG ON, AUNT MAY...I'M GETTING YOU TO A HOSPITAL... YOU'LL BE OKAY...

...SO SORRY...

...YOU SHOULDN'T...

...PEOPLE WILL SEE YOU, THEY'LL KNOW WHO YOU...

...I'M SORRY, I...I MADE A MESS OF...OF...

MAY...

MAY!!!

CRASH!

WHAT THE--

UPSTAIRS!

WHAT IS IT?

WE NEED A TRAUMA TEAM, STAT!

WE'VE GOT A GUNSHOT VICTIM! WE NEED TO STOP THE BLEEDING--

WE NEED COMPRESSION OVER HERE!

GET SOME PLASMA IN HERE, FAST!

SHE'S LOST A LOT OF BLOOD...

...GOD... AN AWFUL LOT...

MR. FISK...GOT A MESSAGE FOR YOU. DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS, BUT--

YOU'RE BETTER OFF THAT WAY, CHARLIE. WHAT'S THE MESSAGE?

A MOVEABLE FEAST

The Old Man and the Sea

EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS STORY TAKES PLACE BEFORE DAREDEVIL #93

"FIRST GIFT BASKET NOT DELIVERED. BUT ONE OF THE OTHER TWO BASKETS WAS DELIVERED."

WELL, THEN, THE EVENING WASN'T A COMPLETE LOSS.

DO YOU KNOW EURIPIDES, CHARLIE?

WHICH CELL?

WHICH CELL. CHARMING. YOU'VE MISSED YOUR CALLING, CHARLIE. A MAN OF YOUR CALIBER SHOULD BE ON THE STAGE.

YEAH? MY WIFE SAYS THE SAME THING, SHE SAYS--

EURIPIDES. GREEK PLAYWRIGHT. 480-406 BC. WROTE *ALCESTIS, MEDEA, ELECTRA*... HE LOVED TRAGEDIES.

WHICH I SUPPOSE GIVES US SOMETHING IN COMMON.

HE WROTE WHAT IS PROBABLY MY FAVORITE LINE OF ALL TIME.

"WHOM THE GODS WOULD DESTROY...THEY FIRST DRIVE MAD."

PROLONGS THE PLEASURE, YOU SEE.

INTENSIFIES IT A THOUSAND-FOLD.

YOU UNDERSTAND, CHARLIE?

SURE THING.

WELL, KIND OF, I...

NO, NOT REALLY, MR. FISK.

JUST AS WELL.

BEST TO THE WIFE, CHARLIE.

THANKS, MR. FISK.

SUNTORY
WHISKEY

MJ...

...BACK HERE.

HOW IS--

THEY'VE STABILIZED HER CONDITION, BUT SHE'S NOT GOOD, MJ, SHE'S--

--SHE'S NOT GOOD, AND I--

--I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING, IT'S OUTSIDE MY CONTROL, I COULDN'T--

THIS IS MY FAULT, MJ, MY--

NO, THAT'S NOT--

MY FAULT...

SHE'S IN COUNTY MEMORIAL. SHE'S GOING TO NEED MONEY--

YOU CAN'T DO THAT...WHOEVER PULLED THE TRIGGER MIGHT COME AFTER HER TO FINISH THE JOB.

I HAVE WHAT I TOOK WHEN I CLEANED OUT MY ACCOUNT. IT'LL COVER HER FOR A WHILE, BUT WITHOUT INSURANCE, WITHOUT TELLING ANYONE WHO SHE IS--

BOOK HER IN UNDER HER MAIDEN NAME, MAY REILLY. THERE MAY EVEN BE A BIRTH CERTIFICATE WITH THAT NAME ON IT SOMEWHERE.

GO TO HER, MJ. SIGN EVERY PIECE OF PAPER YOU HAVE TO, GET THE MACHINE MOVING.

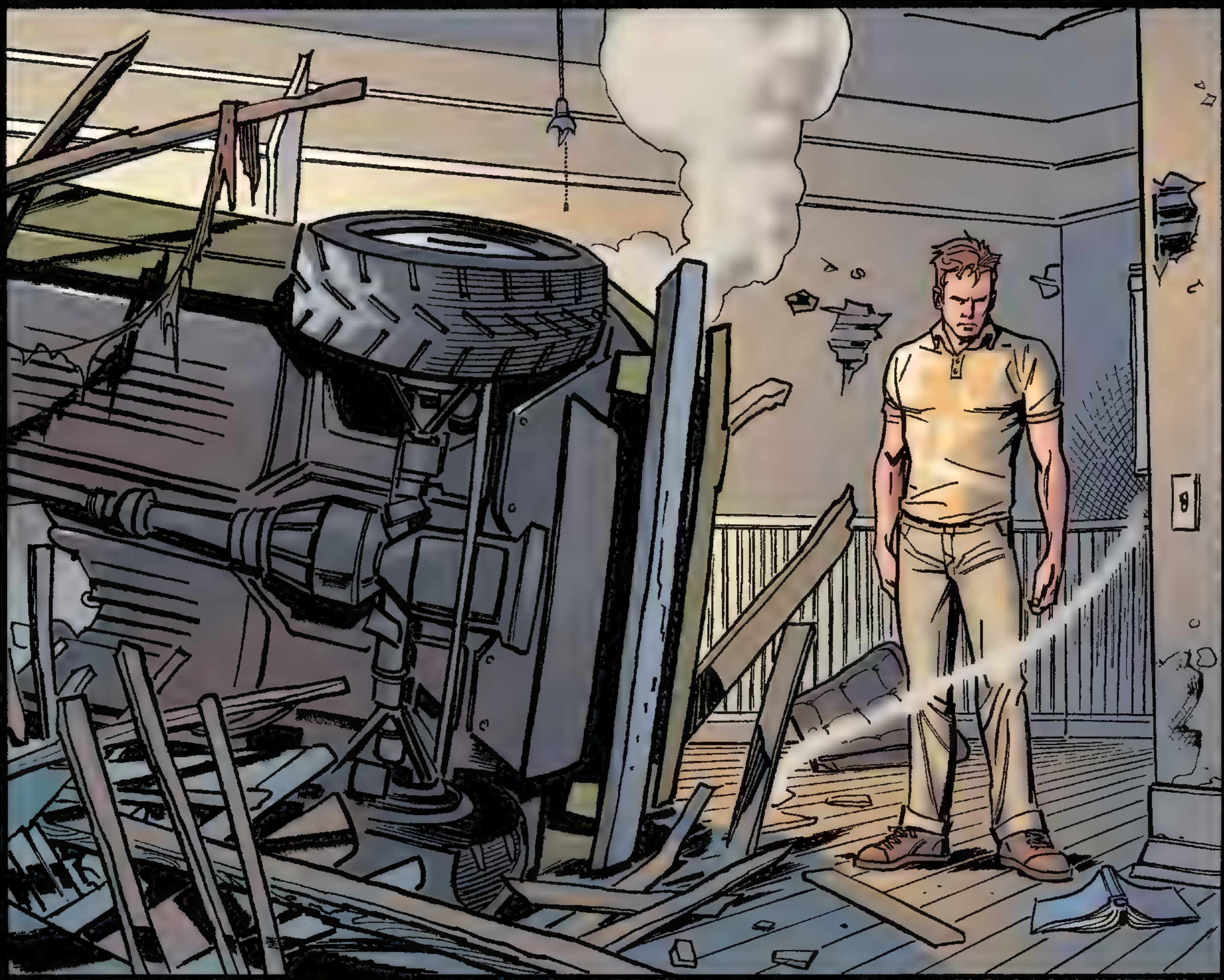
I WILL... WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

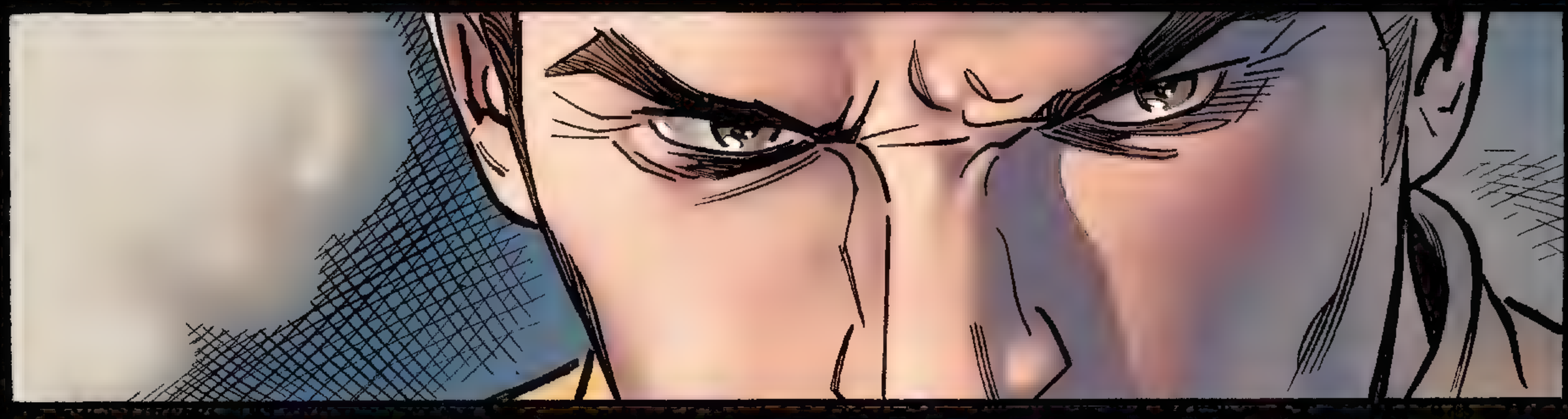
TO DO WHAT I DO BEST WHEN I REALLY PUT MY MIND TO IT, MJ.

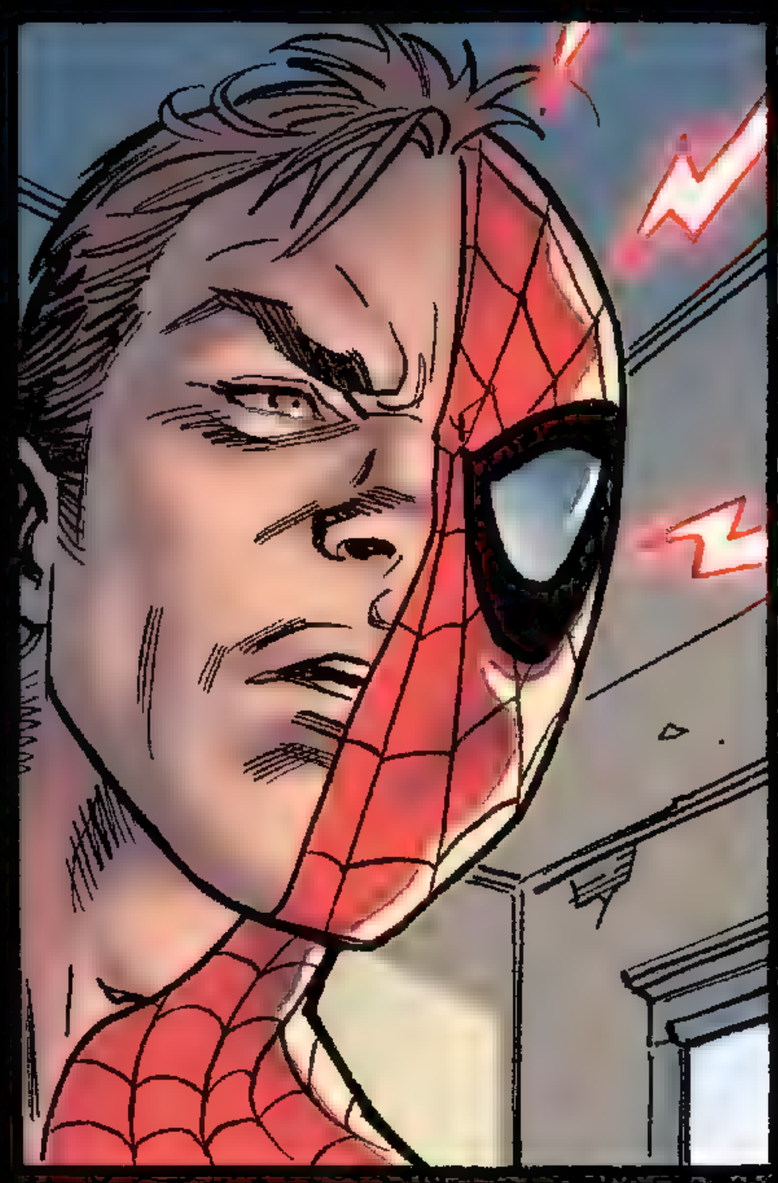
I'M GOING TO HURT SOMEONE.

HEY, PAL, YOU CAN'T COME IN HERE.

I SAID--







GUT WAS

I can't do anything for May right now. I can't even show my ***FACE*** there because it's plastered on every newspaper across town. I'd only be bringing more jeopardy her way.

I can't stand by her bed, can't hold her hand, can't tell her I love her. I have to leave it to MJ and the doctors, who I know are doing everything they can.

This is all I ***CAN*** do...all I know ***HOW*** to do.

In New York, everyone *KNOWS* where the big guys hang out. Untouchables. Guys connected so high up the food chain that even the police are scared to mess with them.

Top-drawer drug dealers who sell to congressmen and celebrities...the underground sex trade...

...gun runners...

NICE. VERY NICE.

AS I PROMISED.

OKAY, BOYS... LET'S TAKE OUR BRIGHTSHINYS AND GET OUT OF--

I don't knock.

CRACK!

I'm not in the mood.

Tonight, I don't care what the deal is, or who these guys are, or why they're buying what they're buying.

Tonight, they're just in the way, between me--

--and him.

But he's not going anywhere.

Not tonight. Not *THIS* night.

On THIS night--

--the rules are gone.

No jokes. No punches pulled.

As of tonight, no one gets away. No one threatens my family.

No one.

No one.

LOOK, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU WANT, BUT--

--I DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE, AND YOU DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE, SO WHY DON'T WE--

SHUT. UP.

TELL ME ABOUT THIS.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, I'VE NEVER SEEN THAT BEFORE IN MY--

I break his hand. It snaps like dry wood.

At another time I would've taken comfort in the thought that this hand would no longer be able to sell a gun to somebody, or pull a trigger. And maybe I will... later.

--HHUCCCHHHHH--

But not tonight.

I DIDN'T ASK YOU IF YOU'D *SEEN* IT BEFORE. I *ASKED* YOU TO *TELL* ME WHAT YOU *KNOW* ABOUT IT.

IT'S...IT'S FROM A GUNTER-WASS SCOPE. HIGH GRADE LENS. FIXED POWER OPTIC. ZERO DISTORTION. CLEANEST PARALLAX ADJUSTMENTS YOU'LL EVER FIND. VERY EXPENSIVE. HARD TO GET IN THE STATES. ONLY A FEW DEALERS CARRY IT.

WHO?

NO, NO WAY, I CAN'T... IF I TELL YOU, THEY'LL KILL ME.

WHAT THEY DO TO YOU IN A DAY OR TWO--IF THEY EVER FIGURE IT OUT--

--IS A *FRACTION* OF WHAT I WILL DO TO YOU RIGHT NOW, IF THE NEXT WORD OUT OF YOUR MOUTH ISN'T A FIRST NAME, FOLLOWED BY A LAST NAME, AND AN ADDRESS.

REPEAT AS NECESSARY.

ALL RIGHT...

...ALL RIGHT...

SHE WOULD'VE BEEN ADMITTED JUST A FEW HOURS AGO...
ESK
NO NAME? HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO FIND HER WITHOUT A--
LOOK, HOW MANY FEMALE SEVENTY-YEAR-OLD GUNSHOT VICTIMS DO YOU *GET* IN A NIGHT?
HONEY, YOU HAVE NO--
MISS?
I'M THE DOCTOR WHO TREATED YOUR--
AUNT. SHE'S MY AUNT. MAY REILLY. WHERE IS SHE?
INTENSIVE CARE. WE'VE DONE EVERYTHING WE CAN, BUT--
BUT SHE'S GOING TO BE OKAY, RIGHT? I MEAN, SHE'S ALIVE--
I'M AFRAID IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE.
SHE'S LAPSED INTO A COMA. WE'RE KEEPING HER ALIVE, BUT IT'S ALL BEING DONE BY MACHINES BECAUSE HER OWN BODY HASN'T PICKED UP THE SLACK.
WHAT'RE YOU--
NOW, IT'S POSSIBLE THAT AGAINST ALL ODDS SHE MIGHT SOMEHOW COME OUT OF THIS COMA AND START FUNCTIONING AGAIN, BUT BARRING THAT--
--SOONER OR LATER--
--I'M AFRAID SHE'S GOING TO DIE.
She'll make it...she'll pull through...somehow... It's what she does...

Now I just have to do *MY* part.

I put this here a long time ago. I got rid of it in the first place because I thought it sent the wrong message.

Maybe I kept it because there might come a day when I'd *WANT* to send that message.

That I won't stop, can't *BE* stopped, until I find the people responsible for shooting May.

I *WILL* find them.

That the rules don't apply anymore. That the gloves are off.

And when I do--

--I'm going to kill them.

Amazing Spider-Man #539
Second Printing Variant
by Leinil Yu

FedEx.
AMBULANCE

BEEP-BREEE

BREEEEEEP

BACK IN BLACK

PART 2 OF 5

PETER...?

HOW IS SHE?

STILL IN INTENSIVE CARE. SHE--

--SHE'S IN A COMA, PETER.

BASICALLY SHE'S BEING KEPT ALIVE BY MACHINES RIGHT NOW. IF NOT FOR THAT, SHE'D BE--

THEY'RE HOPING THAT HER BODY WILL RECOVER ENOUGH TO TAKE OVER FROM THE MACHINES AT SOME POINT, BUT--

--BUT THEY SAY WE SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR THE WORST.

SHE'LL GET THROUGH IT. SHE HAS TO. SHE ALWAYS COMES THROUGH SOMEHOW.

SHOULD I BE THERE? IF THERE'S ANYTHING I CAN DO--

NO, RIGHT NOW THERE'S NOTHING ANYBODY CAN DO EXCEPT WAIT, EVEN THE DOCTORS SAY IT'S ALL UP TO MAY NOW.

THEY WON'T EVEN LET ME IN THE ROOM WITH HER, I HAVE TO LOOK AT HER THROUGH THE WINDOW LIKE SOME KIND OF GOLDFISH.

RIGHT NOW, IF YOU'VE GOT THINGS TO DO, THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO FOR MAY IS TO DEAL WITH THEM, AND GET WHOEVER'S RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS.

BECAUSE FRANKLY, THERE'S NOTHING TO DO HERE EXCEPT CRY.

OKAY, I--

--GOD, MJ, JUST... GOD--

--I'LL CHECK IN EVERY CHANCE I GET, BUT IF ANYTHING CHANGES, AND I MEAN ANYTHING...CALL.

I WILL. ARE YOU OKAY, PETER?

NO...I'M A LONG FREAKING WAY FROM OKAY, MJ. BUT AT LEAST I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO *DO*. OTHERWISE I THINK I'D JUST RIP MY OWN EYES OUT.

ONE THING'S FOR SURE, THOUGH.

"YOU'RE GOING TO SEE A LOT MORE PEOPLE BEING TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL BEFORE THIS DAY IS OUT."

The only lead I've got is a list of four names, black-market gun dealers who sell an extremely high-end sniper scope. Guys who don't like to rat out their customers.

But I can fix that.

Very--

--VERY--

--quickly.

Three down. One to go.

Time to turn it on.

LOOK, PAL, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, I--

UNNGH!

YEAH? SO WHAT'RE YOU GONNA DO ABOUT IT, HOT-SHOT? HALF THE COUNTRY'S LOOKING TO ARREST YOUR @$$.

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

NO...WAIT... *WAIT--*

YOU SELL GUNS INTENDED FOR ONE THING ONLY: TO KILL PEOPLE FROM FAR AWAY BECAUSE, LIKE YOU, THE PEOPLE WHO BUY YOUR GARBAGE ARE COWARDS, AFRAID TO GET TOO CLOSE.

SO YOU LIVE UP HERE, WITH THE RICH FOLK, HIGH ABOVE THE GROUND WHERE YOUR GUNS ARE USED--

--WHILE THE COWARDS WHO *BUY* FROM YOU *FIRE AT INNOCENT PEOPLE FROM ACROSS THE STREET!*

NOOOOO!

THWAP

SO.

WANT TO ASK ME A *SECOND* TIME WHAT I'M GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

NO...NO, PLEASE...I'LL DO *ANYTHING*.

YOU SELL GUNTER-WASS SNIPER SCOPES. VERY HIGH-END. HARD TO GET IN THE STATES. WHO DID YOU SELL THEM TO?

I ONLY GOT IN A COUPLE, I SWEAR--

NAMES.

RIGHT.

NOW.

He does as I ask.

The first two names belong to rich hunters who like to cut down the odds when it's them and a safari party against an animal half a mile away.

But the third name...

...the *THIRD* name...

...was the name I'd come looking for.

Jake Martino. A hit man working freelance around the country, doing jobs nobody else wanted. Which meant his attack on us wasn't personal, somebody hired him. The question now is who.

The dealer said Jake had friends in high places, that he was connected. Untouchable.

Well, he's about to *GET* touched. But first I need to find out where he is, and I don't have a lot of time. He might already be getting ready to bug out.

So I decide to cut through the red tape.

LOOK, PAL, YOU *KNOW* BETTER THAN TO DO THIS IN AN ALLEY--

S'NOT MY FAULT...I HADDA LOT TO DRINK, AND WHEN YOU GOTTA GO, YOU GOTTA GO--

LOOK, WE *ALL* GOT PROBLEMS. I GOTTA GO TOO, BUT I *WAIT* UNTIL I GET SOMEWHERE THAT I CAN--

UHM, MAC?

THAT MAY NOT BE AN OPTION.

Nothing personal against the NYPD--

--but I need this, and I don't think they'd let me borrow it for a few minutes.

JAKE MARTINO

Come on, come on, come on...what're they giving the NYPD these days for computers, old Commodore 64s?

Bingo.

I'm too late...he's cleaned the place out. He could be anywhere by now--

NORMALLY, I'D SAY THE WINDOW'S GONNA COST YOU--

--BUT I SAW YOU ON THE TV FIGHTING ALONGSIDE CAPTAIN AMERICA. USED TO BE IN THE ARMY MYSELF, AND WE ALL GOT A LOT OF RESPECT FOR CAP. ANYBODY WHO'S OKAY WITH HIM IS ACES BY ME.

BUT NEXT TIME, *KNOCK* FER CHRISSAKES.

SORRY, I WAS IN KIND OF A HURRY.

AM I RIGHT THAT JAKE MARTINO LIVES HERE?

YEAH. NICE GUY. QUIET. PAYS HIS RENT ON TIME, IN CASH. ONLY STAYS IN TOWN A FEW DAYS HERE AND THERE. I THINK HE MUST BE LIKE A CONSULTANT OR SOMETHING.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE I CAN FIND HIM?

YOU JUST MISSED HIM. HE CAME IN ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES AGO, GOT HIS STUFF AND GRABBED A CAB. I HEARD HIM SAY TO TAKE HIM TO THE TRAIN STATION.

Of course. An assassin, a sniper, couldn't exactly bring the tools of his trade into an airport. Unless you're driving, the train station is the last way out where they don't x-ray your luggage.

THANKS FOR THE HELP. NOW I HAVE TO--

WHAT, YOU CAN'T USE THE DOOR LIKE A CIVILIZED PERSON?

LISTEN, YOU OUGHTA KNOW... YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY GUY LOOKING FOR JAKE! TWO OTHER GUYS WERE JUST HERE! YO! DIDJA HEAR ME?

I heard him. My guess is that whoever hired him is looking to slam the door, make sure I can't find out who ordered the hit.

Which makes it all the more vital that I find him before they do.

The question is, how do I find this guy when I don't know what he looks like, or where he's going? He could still be waiting, or he could already be on a train and halfway to Newark by now.

There's just one chance, assuming he hasn't already left.

HEY, YO, IT'S SPIDER-MAN!

This guy tried to kill me and my family, so when he sees me, my guess is that he'll react big-time.

And with any luck, his reaction will be enough to trigger my spider sense.

HEY, WHATCHOO DOIN' HERE, SPIDEY? YOU NEED A LIFT SOMEWHERE?

SPIDEY? YOU IN THERE?

SHH...I THINK HE'S CONCENTRATING.

DON'T TOUCH HIM, MAN, I'M SERIOUS.

Got you.

TRACK 19

He makes a break for it. Good. I *WANT* him to run.

I want him to know what it feels like to be hunted.

Cornered.

Outgunned.

Doomed.

CLICK CLICK CLICK

Dead man walking.

BLAMM!

He drops the gun as I break his arm.

CRACK!

PICK IT UP.

YOU'VE STILL GOT ONE GOOD ARM. GO AHEAD.

...NO...

I SAID PICK IT UP!

NOT SO EASY IS IT, WHEN THE OTHER SIDE FIGHTS BACK? NOT AS EASY AS SHOOTING AN OLD WOMAN THROUGH A WINDOW FROM ACROSS THE STREET? IS IT?

IS IT?

UNNHHH!

YOU SHOT HER! YOU SHOT MY AUNT!

PLEASE, I--

SHUT UP!

YOU DIDN'T SHOW ANY MERCY, WHY SHOULD I?

I DIDN'T--

YOU'RE A COWARD. THE WORST KIND OF COWARD, WHO HIDES BEHIND A TELESCOPIC LENS AND FIRES FROM COVER. AFRAID TO SHOW YOUR FACE. AFRAID TO LOOK YOUR VICTIMS IN THE EYE.

WELL, LOOK IN MY EYES, AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.

NO? CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE? THEN LET ME ELUCIDATE.

I'M GOING TO KILL YOU. *AFTER* YOU TELL ME WHO HIRED YOU.

TELL ME NOW, AND I'LL END THIS FAST. HESITATE, DRAG THIS OUT...AND I'LL SHOW YOU DEPTHS AND LEVELS OF PAIN YOU'VE NEVER EVEN *DREAMED* OF.

I... I...

He's going to give up the name. I can tell.

And then I feel it.

NO!

Martino's unconscious. Just one chance--

--if I can make it.

Yes!

But there's always the chance that he might find the tracer and ditch it.

Track 3

PACINO GODS UP THERE LAUGHING

42 St - Grand Central

WE NEED AN AMBULANCE!

I can't afford to lose Martino, in case he wakes up.

So I stay with him.

And as we race through the streets of the city, I ask myself--

--was I really prepared to kill him for shooting May?

And the answer comes back.

Yes.

In another time and place I would've been ashamed of that answer.

But not now... not this day.

But I discover the universe is still capable of dramatic irony as we pull into the same hospital where May is being treated.

Part of me is offended by the idea that the same hands that worked to keep May alive will now work to do the same for him.

But another part sees the symmetry in that...and approves.

PETER...?

I'VE BEEN SO WORRIED ABOUT YOU--

I'M FINE. HOW'S MAY?

NOT GOOD, PETER--

--SHE'S... NOT GOING TO MAKE IT.

Over the next few minutes, between sobs, she fills me in.

Coma.

Life support's all that stands between her and death.

Only a matter of time.

A matter of time.

IT'S NO GOOD...

HE'S GONE.

MARK TIME OF DEATH FOR THE CERTIFICATE, AND NOTE CAUSE AS--

"--DEATH BY GUNSHOT."

A sniper killed from afar by another man with a gun and good aim.

The symmetries tonight are so thick you could cut them with a knife.

IT'S OKAY, MJ, WE'LL GET THROUGH THIS, WE'LL SAVE HER SOMEHOW. AS LONG AS SHE'S ALIVE WE CAN'T STOP FIGHTING. IT'S NOT OVER.

WE'LL SAVE HER. WE WILL.

SOMEHOW.

Then I feel the proximity of the spider tracer...feel someone touching the web that has become my life.

And I know it's time.

YEAH, HE'S GONE. NO, AS FAR AS I KNOW, HE DIDN'T TALK. DIDN'T HAVE TIME. WE TOOK CARE OF IT.

YOU GOT ANY OTHER INSTRUCTIONS?

PSST... HEY, MISTER...

HEY--

SORRY, I DIDN'T HEAR YOU, I--

SHHHHH....

MMPTHHH!

--WE'LL FIGURE IT OUT FROM THERE.

I RECOMMEND CLEARING OUT HIS APARTMENT IN CASE HE LEFT BEHIND ANYTHING THAT CAN TIE US TO THIS.

THEN JUST LIE LOW UNTIL I GET BACK TO YOU.

It's just a single sentence...but I'd recognize that voice anywhere.

HELLO, MR. FISK.

WELL, HELLO, MR. PARKER. AND WHAT MAY I DO FOR YOU?

JUST ONE THING, MR. FISK.

YOU CAN DIE.

Amazing Spider-Man #541

At last I know the truth. It was the Kingpin who hired the man who tried to kill me, and instead shot Aunt May.

The gunman is dead.

One down, one to go.

I CAN DIE?

MR. PARKER, LET ME EXPLAIN THE WORLD TO YOU.

BACK IN BLACK

PART 3 OF 5

I DON'T DIE. I HAVE SOME WHO DO THAT *FOR* ME, AND SOME WHO DO THAT *BECAUSE* OF ME.

BUT *I* DON'T *DIE*. IT WOULD BE--

--A VIOLATION OF THE LAWS OF NATURE, MR. PARKER.

IN THE LAST 48 HOURS, I'VE BROKEN JUST ABOUT EVERY LAW THERE IS, MR. FISK.

AMBULANCES ONLY

WHAT'S ONE MORE?

I'M GOING TO PULL THAT OFF, AND THEN YOU'RE GOING TO TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THE MAN YOU JUST SHOT.

MMMPH!

I yank off the webbing.

AAGGH!

But I don't do it gently.

LOOK, PLEASE, I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIM, I SWEAR--

DON'T LIE TO ME. I CAN *HEAR* YOUR HEARTBEAT.

IT GOES FASTER WHEN YOU LIE.

LIE TO ME AGAIN AND I'LL PULL IT OUT OF YOUR CHEST AND SHOW IT TO YOU.

It's not true, but he doesn't know that.

OKAY, OKAY!

LOOK, ALL I KNOW IS THE KINGPIN WANTED HIM OUT OF THE WAY 'CAUSE HE KNEW SOMETHING THE BOSS DIDN'T WANT ANYBODY ***ELSE*** TO KNOW.

THAT'S IT, THAT'S ALL, I SWEAR!

The terror in his eyes lets me know he's telling the truth.

I said I'd kill anyone directly involved in the shooting, but he's not. The Kingpin is using him same as he uses everybody else.

But I still need to send a message.

Then I hear MJ's footsteps coming toward us. I don't want this guy to know she or Aunt May are here.

PETER? WHAT'RE--

PETER?

"EVERYTHING OKAY, MR. FISK?"

REASONABLY SO, CHARLIE. YOU?

GOOD. WELL, YOU KNOW. ALLERGIES SOMETIMES. IT'S THIS GLOBAL WARMING THING, RAISES THE POLLEN COUNT. I--

I NEED YOU TO DO SOMETHING FOR ME, CHARLIE.

WELL, SURE, MR. FISK, AS LONG AS IT'S... YOU KNOW...WITHIN THE RULES.

I'M AFRAID I CAN'T HELP YOU THERE, CHARLIE, BECAUSE TODAY--

--TODAY--

CRUNCH!

--WE ARE GOING FAR, *FAR* BEYOND THE RULES.

WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED IN THIS PLACE, THERE WAS SOME THOUGHT THAT I MIGHT BE STUCK HERE FOR A VERY, VERY LONG TIME. SO I MADE SURE THAT THERE WERE AMPLE--

--SUPPLIES--

--AROUND SHOULD THEY EVER BE REQUIRED.

YOU SEE, IN ANCIENT TIMES, IT WAS NOT UNCOMMON FOR A KING TO BE KIDNAPPED AND HELD HOSTAGE UNTIL A FEE WORTHY OF THE KING WAS PAID.

CRUNCH!

AND WELL, IN AN ENVIRONMENT LIKE THIS, A MAN SUCH AS MYSELF MUST BE PREPARED FOR *ANY* EVENTUALITY, HOWEVER UNLIKELY, INCLUDING THE POSSIBILITY OF SOMEONE MAKING JUST SUCH A MOVE.

PWN

MATT. 2:1

GIVEN THAT HISTORY LESSON, DO YOU KNOW WHAT I'M HOLDING IN MY HANDS, CHARLIE? CAN YOU GUESS WHAT THIS IS CALLED?

A KING'S RANSOM?

THAT'S RIGHT, CHARLIE. A KING'S RANSOM. NOT A KINGPIN'S RANSOM, BECAUSE BASED ON VALUE IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO SNEAK THAT MUCH MONEY INTO THIS CELL... BUT A KING'S RANSOM?

OH, YES. MOST DEFINITELY.

SINCE MY ATTORNEYS TELL ME THERE'S A CHANCE THAT I MAY BE RELEASED SOON--THERE IS APPARENTLY SOME NEW NEGOTIATION GOING ON--I NO LONGER HAVE NEED OF THIS. SO I'M GOING TO BUY SOMETHING WITH IT.

EDITOR'S NOTE: FOR MORE ON THIS NEGOTIATION, SEE DAREDEVIL, ISSUES #92 AND 93.

THE SECOND THING I WANT YOU TO DO IS TO SHARE SOME OF YOUR NEWFOUND FORTUNE WITH THE GUARDS ON NIGHT SHIFT. USE AS MUCH AS YOU NEED TO CONVINCE THEM TO SIMPLY... LOOK THE OTHER WAY AT SOME POINT THIS EVENING.

JUST LOOK THE OTHER WAY, THAT'S ALL?

THAT'S ALL. ONCE YOU'VE DONE THAT, THE REST IS YOURS.

YOU AND THE MISSUS CAN FINALLY TAKE A NICE, LONG VACATION. PERHAPS FOR A CHANGE OF PACE YOU'LL FINALLY TRY SOMEPLACE THAT DOESN'T REQUIRE THEIR EMPLOYEES TO RUN AROUND IN MOUSE EARS.

SWITZERLAND, FOR INSTANCE.

YOU--

--YOU SAID THAT WAS THE ***SECOND*** THING. WHAT'S THE FIRST?

WHEN I CHECKED INTO THIS FINE ESTABLISHMENT, MY BELONGINGS WERE TAKEN AND STORED IN THE HOLDING LOCKERS DOWNSTAIRS. I WANT YOU TO GO DOWN THERE AND BRING ME SOMETHING.

I WANT YOU TO BRING ME MY CLOTHES.

I need to send a message.

HERE'S THE THING OF IT, MISTER.

JIM...MY NAME IS JIM... PLEASE, DON'T DO THIS... PLEASE...

HERE'S THE THING OF IT, *JIM.*

BY ALL RIGHTS, I SHOULD KILL YOU. NO, YOU WEREN'T DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN WHAT HAPPENED, BUT YOU WERE AN ACCESSORY AFTER THE FACT, AND THAT QUALIFIES YOU BY A TECHNICALITY.

...OGOD... OGOD...

BUT THEN I DECIDED TO SAVE MYSELF FOR THE MAN WHO GAVE THE ORDER, NOT THE GUY LOWER ON THE FOOD CHAIN.

YOU *DO* UNDERSTAND THE FOOD CHAIN, DON'T YOU...*JIM?*

HELP! SOMEBODY! PLEASE, HELP!

NO? THEN LET ME EXPLAIN.

THE FOOD CHAIN CONSISTS OF TWO PARTS. PREDATORS AND PREY.

PREDATORS... WELL, I DON'T THINK I REALLY NEED TO EXPLAIN THAT, DO I?

PREDATORS FEED ON PREY, AND WE MAY DEFINE PREY AS SOMETHING INCAPABLE OF DEFENDING ITSELF IN PROPORTION TO THE ATTACK.

A DEER AGAINST A WOLF, FOR INSTANCE.

OR AN OLD--

--DEFENSELESS--

--WOMAN--

--AGAINST A *MAN WITH A HIGH-POWERED RIFLE!*

THOSE ARE TWO EXAMPLES OF PREY, *JIM*.

I'M BETTING THAT RIGHT NOW, YOU COULD SUPPLY ME WITH A THIRD.

PLEASE! THEY'RE...THEY'RE ALL *OVER* ME! PLEASE! I'LL DO ANYTHING!

YEAH?

FWISSH!

THEN HERE'S SOMETHING YOU CAN DO FOR ME.

TELL EVERYONE... TELL THE PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH...TELL EVERYONE IN THE WHOLE WIDE *WORLD*... THAT MY FAMILY IS OFF-LIMITS. THAT NOBODY--

--NOBODY--

--TOUCHES THEM. FOR ANY REASON.

EVER.

TELL THEM. MAKE THEM *UNDERSTAND*--

--THAT ANYONE WHO *TRIES* MOVES TO THE BOTTOM OF THE FOOD CHAIN...AND BECOMES PREY.

AND DOWN HERE, IN *THIS* FOOD CHAIN, THE *RATS* AREN'T THE PREDATORS. THE MEN WITH *GUNS* AREN'T THE PREDATORS.

I AM.

HAS THERE BEEN ANY CHANGE? ANY CHANGE AT *ALL?*

NO...AT LEAST NONE FOR THE BETTER.

THE MACHINES ARE THE ONLY THINGS KEEPING HER ALIVE RIGHT NOW. HER BRAIN IS UNDAMAGED SO FAR, BUT THE REST OF HER BODY HAS JUST...SHUT DOWN. IF WE LOST POWER, FOR EVEN A MOMENT--

UNDERSTOOD.

AND SOMETHING ELSE.

THERE'S A SOMETHING ELSE?

I'M PAYING FOR THIS IN CASH WITH EVERYTHING WE WERE ABLE TO TAKE OUT OF OUR SAVINGS, BUT IT'S GOING FAST. WHAT ALL THIS COSTS--THE EXTREME MEASURES, A PRIVATE ROOM, CRITICAL CARE--WE'RE BURNING THROUGH THAT MONEY WITH A SPEED THAT'S JUST FRIGHTENING.

THEN I'LL GET MORE MONEY, SOMEHOW, I--

IT'S NOT JUST THAT.

NOBODY PAYS FOR MEDICAL CARE IN CASH UPFRONT, IT ALWAYS GOES THROUGH AN INSURANCE COMPANY...UNLESS YOU'RE TRYING NOT TO BE NOTICED BY THE LAW OR SOMEBODY ELSE. THE MORE WE PAY CASH, THE MORE WE DRAW ATTENTION TO HER SITUATION.

SOONER OR LATER, SHE'S GOING TO BE NOTICED. WHEN THAT HAPPENS, IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY FIGURE OUT WHO *SHE* IS, AND WHO *YOU* ARE. AND THEN--

THEN THE BAD PEOPLE COME.

YEAH...THEN THE BAD PEOPLE COME.

OKAY. OKAY.

SO.

WE GO FOR A HAIL MARY PLAY.

DO YOU REMEMBER ME TELLING YOU HOW I ONCE HAD SOME DOCTORS GIVE AUNT MAY A TRANSFUSION OF MY BLOOD? IT SAVED HER LIFE.

EDITOR'S NOTE:
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #10.

YES...BUT YOU ALSO SAID THAT THE RADIATION IN YOUR BLOOD ALMOST KILLED HER LATER, AND YOU HAD TO GO THROUGH SOME PRETTY--

--RADICAL STEPS TO GET A CURE TO HER IN TIME.

I KNOW, I KNOW--

--BUT IF THE SERUM THAT SAVED HER HAD A LASTING EFFECT, IT MIGHT ALLOW HER TO ACCEPT MY BLOOD NOW.

BESIDES, WHEN THEY DID THE TRANSFUSION, THEY PURIFIED IT, TAKING OUT EVERYTHING BUT THE RED BLOOD CELLS TO AVOID FLUID OVERLOAD. MY WHITE BLOOD CELLS COULD HAVE SAVED HER FROM HAVING THAT REACTION.

SO IT WOULD HAVE TO BE A STRAIGHT-UP TRANSFUSION, NO DOCTORS TO PURIFY THINGS OR GET IN THE WAY.

EDITOR'S NOTE:
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #31-33.

WHAT DO YOU NEED ME TO DO?

"I KNOW *HOW* TO DO IT, ALL I NEED IS THE EQUIPMENT.

"WE'LL NEED INTRAVENOUS TUBING, SHARPS, AND AN EMERGENCY STERILE TRANSFUSION KIT, PROBABLY MARKED ON THE FIRST AID BOXES AS GIVING SETS AND CANNULAE.

"I DECIDED A LONG TIME AGO THAT THIS WAS TOO DANGEROUS TO TRY AGAIN EXCEPT UNDER ONE CIRCUMSTANCE."

"WHAT CIRCUMSTANCE IS THAT, PETER?"

"WHEN NEITHER ONE OF US HAS ANYTHING LEFT TO LOSE."

IF IT HAS ANY EFFECT, WE SHOULD SEE IT PRETTY FAST. MEANWHILE--

PETER--

I SHOULD GO, I HAVE PLACES TO GO AND PEOPLE TO--

PETER, YOU SHOULDN'T BE GOING ANYWHERE. AFTER GIVING THAT MUCH BLOOD YOU NEED TO LIE DOWN, YOU'RE GOING TO BE WEAK--

I CAN'T, I-- I HAVE TO BE SOMEWHERE.

PETER, *LISTEN* TO ME, YOU'RE IN NO CONDITION TO--

NOK-NOK

MS. REILLY?

YES, JUST A MINUTE, I--

NEVER MIND--

"--IT'S TOO LATE."

WHAT THE--

SHUNK!

SHUNK!

SHUNK!

SHUNK!

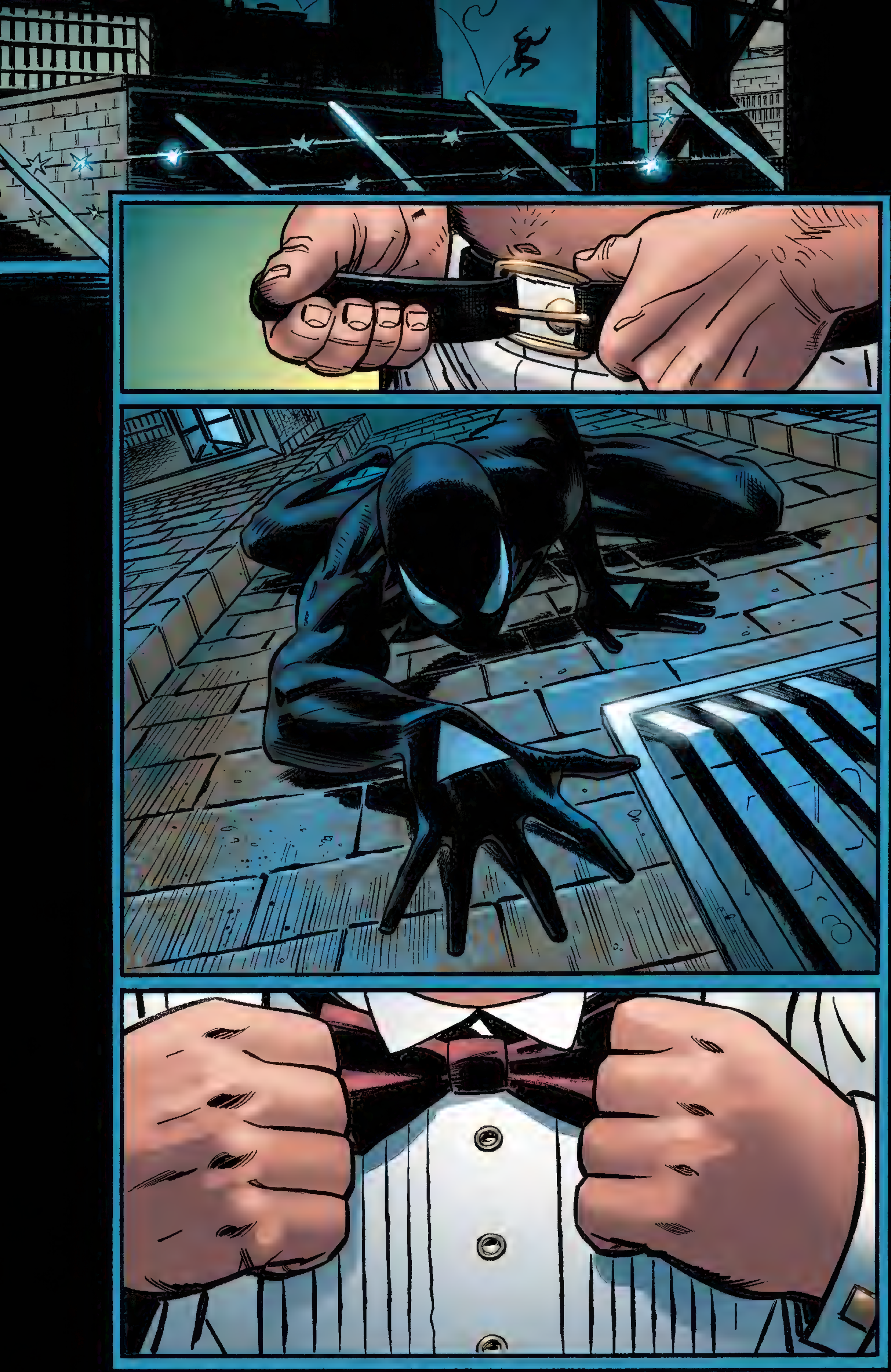
SHUNK!

HOW--?

WHO OPENED THE DOORS?

SHUNK!

PIC25



CLICK CLICK CLICK CLICK CLICK

CLICK

CRASH!

END OF THE ROAD, FISK.

YOU.

ME.

RIGHT NOW.

Amazing Spider-Man #542

AS FAR AS AMBIENCE IS CONCERNED, IT'S NOT QUITE WHAT I WOULD HAVE CHOSEN FOR THE GRAND FINALE OF OUR LONG ASSOCIATION--

--SOMETHING PERHAPS A BIT MORE REGAL, OR EVEN A TOUCH GLADIATORIAL--

--BUT AS ARENAS GO, AT LEAST THIS ONE CERTAINLY COMES WITH A VERY APPRECIATIVE AUDIENCE, WOULDN'T YOU SAY, MR. PARKER?

BACK IN BLACK

PART 4 OF 5

AS I LOOK AROUND THIS ROOM, I SEE MURDERERS AND RAPISTS, THIEVES AND THUGS, PERVERTS AND PSYCHOTICS. MEN WHO MAY ONCE HAVE ASPIRED TO BE MORE THAN THESE THINGS, BUT HAVE SETTLED FOR THE NAMES THEY HAVE BEEN GIVEN.

BUT NO MATTER HOW DEBASED, PERVERSE, CRUDE OR FALLEN, THERE'S NOT A MAN HERE WHO DOES NOT LOOK DOWN ON ONE PARTICULAR BREED OF HUMANITY.

THE CHUMP.

A CHUMP IS SOMEONE WHO BELIEVES IN THE GREATER GOOD. WHO BELIEVES THAT GOOD TRIUMPHS ***BECAUSE*** IT IS GOOD. TRUSTS THE GOVERNMENT, TRUSTS HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, TRUSTS THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK WHO SAYS "SHOW THE WORLD YOUR TRUE FACE, PETER. IT'LL BE OKAY."

AND WE ALL SAW THAT FACE, DIDN'T WE? THE FACE OF A CHUMP.

A CHUMP WHO IS NOW HUNTED BY THE PEOPLE HE BELIEVED IN, SPURNED BY THE SYSTEM HE SUPPORTED, ABANDONED BY THE FRIENDS HE THOUGHT HE HAD, HIS WIFE LIVING IN A TWO-BIT MOTEL AND HIS DEAR, SWEET AUNT DYING IN A HOSPITAL BED BECAUSE HE COULDN'T EVEN STAND STILL LONG ENOUGH TO TAKE THE BULLET THAT WAS HIS BY RIGHT.

BUT I GUESS YOU CAN'T MAKE AN OMELETTE WITHOUT BREAKING A FEW OLD LADIES.

EVEN HIS USUAL SENSE OF HUMOR AND DEVIL-MAY-CARE ATTITUDE SEEMS TO HAVE ABANDONED HIM. MUST BE TERRIBLY DISTRESSING AND UNFORTUNATE TO HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING LEFT IN LIFE EXCEPT THE DESIRE FOR REVENGE.

WHICH IS ESPECIALLY UNFORTUNATE SINCE ONCE YOU'VE MADE A MOCKERY OF EVERYTHING YOU STAND FOR AND VICTIMIZED THE WOMEN YOU SAID YOU LOVED, REALLY, WHAT'S LEFT *EXCEPT* HUMOR?

MOVING LIKE THE TRAP-DOOR SPIDER YOU IMAGINE YOURSELF TO BE, EH? LEAPING ON THE PREY SUDDENLY IN HOPES OF WEARING IT OUT OR CONFUSING IT, EH?

CHEAP THEATRICS. I HAD EXPECTED BETTER.

WELL?

YOU SAID YOU WERE COMING HERE TO KILL ME. ARE YOU HERE TO FIGHT, OR DANCE?

SAY SOMETHING, DAMN YOU.

ALL RIGHT.

WHAT THIS SUIT STANDS FOR, WHAT IT ***MEANS***...IS SOMETHING YOU CAN NEVER UNDERSTAND. IT REPRESENTS A PROMISE ABOUT ALL THE THINGS I SAID I WOULD DO--

--AND ALL THE THINGS I SAID I WOULD NEVER DO...ALL THE LINES I SAID I WOULD NEVER, EVER CROSS BECAUSE DOING SO WOULD DESTROY EVERYTHING THIS SUIT STANDS FOR.

AND ***THAT***, YOU SEE, IS WHY YOU'RE CONFUSED.

I'M NOT HERE TO KILL YOU.

I AM.

THE CROWD ROARS AS THEY FIGHT.

HE DOESN'T HEAR IT.

THERE'S NO CROWD. NO JOKES. NO CUTE REMARKS. NO ACROBATICS. NO WEBBING. NO TRICKS.

HE THINKS ONLY ONE THING.

"THIS IS THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BULLET THAT RIPPED THROUGH ONE OF THE TWO PEOPLE I LOVE MORE THAN LIFE ITSELF."

"NO. NOT A MAN.

"A TARGET."

YOU FORGOT SOMETHING, FISK. SOMETHING YOU SHOULD'VE REMEMBERED BEFORE YOU DECIDED TO PUT A BULLET THROUGH SOMEONE TOO OLD AND FRAIL TO GET OUT OF THE WAY.

AND IT'S THIS.

FOR ALL YOUR ***MONEY***, FOR ALL YOUR ***CRUELTY***, FOR ALL YOUR BIG ***TALK***...YOU DON'T HAVE ANY REAL ***POWER***. YOU CAN'T FLY, CAN'T STICK TO WALLS, CAN'T TURN INTO LIVING FLAME OR STRETCH OUT ACROSS A TWENTY-FOOT ROOM.

AT THE END OF THE DAY, YOU'RE JUST A FAT MAN WITH AN ATTITUDE...A BALLOON JUST WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO STICK A NEEDLE IN IT.

AND ME?

I'M THE NEEDLE.

AAAARRH!

UNNNH!

HUNH!

GET UP, FISK.

I SAID, GET UP!

...KILL YOU... SWEAR TO GOD I'LL KILL...

...GO TO HELL...

...I'LL GET UP WHEN I...I...

...CAN'T...

SLAP!

SLAP!

SLAP!

SLAP!

SLAP!

SLAP!

SLAP!

SLAP!

SLAP!

BALLOON.
NEEDLE.
NOW.
HERE'S HOW IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN.
I POUR A STREAM OF WEBBING DEEP INTO YOUR THROAT, YOUR ESOPHAGUS, ALL THE WAY DOWN INTO YOUR LUNGS, FILLING THEM COMPLETELY. THE ONLY WAY TO REMOVE IT SURGICALLY WOULD BE TO CUT OUT YOUR LUNGS, WHICH COULD NOT POSSIBLY BE DONE BEFORE YOU'D DIE FROM LACK OF OXYGEN.
I TURN YOUR ENTIRE RESPIRATORY SYSTEM INTO ONE BIG SOLID CHUNK OF USELESS TISSUE AND WEBBING.
IT TAKES THREE SECONDS.
ONE...
...TWO...
...THREE.

...WHAT--

UNH!

IF YOU'RE GOING...TO KILL ME...GET IT OVER WITH.

OH, I WILL. I SAID I WAS GOING TO KILL YOU, AND I AM.

BUT I DIDN'T SAY I WAS GOING TO DO IT *TODAY.*

YOU SEE, I'VE ***LEARNED*** SOMETHING FROM YOU, FISK. SOMETHING ABOUT CRUELTY... AND TIMING.

I'VE DONE SOMETHING FAR WORSE THAN KILL YOU, FISK.

I'VE ***BEATEN*** YOU.

AND EVERY MAN IN THIS ROOM *SAW* ME BEAT YOU.

AND *THEY* WILL TELL *THEIR* PALS, AND *THOSE* GUYS WILL TELL *THEIR* PALS, AND ON, AND ON...

...AND SOON THE WHOLE *CITY*, THE WHOLE *COUNTRY*, WILL KNOW WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW...THAT YOU'VE BEEN BEATEN, IN PUBLIC, ONE-ON-ONE.

AND FOR A MAN AS *PRIDEFUL* AS YOU, WHO *NEEDS* FOR EVERYONE TO BELIEVE HE CAN'T BE BEATEN...THAT'S THE WORST PAIN YOU CAN EVER FEEL.

I *WANT* YOU TO LIVE WITH THAT KNOWLEDGE BECAUSE I KNOW IT WILL TEAR YOU APART DEEP INSIDE EVERY WAKING MOMENT OF EVERY DAY. I *WANT* YOU TO LIVE IN THAT KIND OF PERSONAL HELL. I *WANT* YOU TO *BURN*, FISK.

FOR A WHILE, AT LEAST. AND THEN...

YOU SEE, I'VE ALWAYS TRIED TO AVOID KILLING ANYONE PARTLY FOR MY OWN PRINCIPLES, AND PARTLY BECAUSE I WAS ALWAYS AFRAID HOW IT WOULD AFFECT MY *FAMILY* IF I KILLED SOMEONE. BUT IF MY AUNT IS DEAD,WELL... THAT TAKES CARE OF ONE REASON, AND THE OTHER... WELL, I CAN MAKE AN EXCEPTION.

SO. HERE'S HOW IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN.

THE MOMENT MY AUNT DIES, I'M COMING BACK FOR YOU, AND WE'RE GOING TO FINISH WHAT WE STARTED. AND AS OF RIGHT NOW, YOU KNOW--

--YOU ***KNOW*** THAT THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO TO STOP ME. I WILL COME TO YOU, AND I WILL COUNT.

ONE...TWO... THREE.

MEANWHILE, YOU'LL LIVE WITH THE ***MEMORY*** OF THIS MOMENT, THE ***HUMILIATION*** OF THIS MOMENT...AND THE ***MESSAGE*** OF THIS MOMENT--

AND THEN--

--YOU'LL BE DEAD.

I SWEAR TO YOU, ON MY LIFE AND HER SOUL, ON EVERYTHING I HOLD DEAR...YOU'LL BE DEAD.

--WHICH IS DIRECTED AT THE REST OF YOU, AND EVERYONE YOU KNOW. PUT THE WORD OUT. IF ***ANYONE*** COMES NEAR ME OR MY FAMILY AGAIN...IF ANYONE EVEN ***TOUCHES*** THEM, OR ANYONE ***ELSE*** WHO MATTERS TO ME--

ROBBY

MATT

MIKE

--YOU WILL EXPERIENCE FIRSTHAND WHAT HAPPENED HERE TODAY.

YOU TOUCH THEM, YOU DIE. PAINFULLY. SLOWLY. DEFINITIVELY.

YOU ORDERED HER DEATH, FISK, SO IT IS ONLY APPROPRIATE THAT YOUR LIFE ENDS WHEN HERS DOES. SO IF I WERE YOU, I'D START PRAYING RIGHT ABOUT NOW TO TRY AND CONVINCE GOD TO GIVE HER EVERY POSSIBLE SECOND OF LIFE.

BUT TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, IN YOUR POSITION, I WOULDN'T COUNT TOO MUCH ON GOD IF I WERE YOU.

SEE YOU AROUND, MR. FISK.

COUNT ON IT.

...WHAT'RE YOU LOOKING AT?

"DID YOU GET DONE EVERYTHING YOU HAD TO DO, PETER?"

YEAH... ALL DONE.

FOR NOW, ANYWAY. BUT LATER--

THAT'S SOMETHING WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT.

I DON'T--

WE CAN'T KEEP HER HERE MUCH LONGER, PETER.

THIS IS THE MOST EXPENSIVE HOSPITAL IN NEW YORK.

ALSO THE BEST, THAT'S WHY I BROUGHT HER HERE.

I KNOW, BUT WE'RE ALMOST HALFWAY THROUGH THE MONEY I WAS ABLE TO PULL OUT OF OUR SAVINGS.

IF WE MOVE HER SOMEPLACE--

CHEAPER?

--LESS BREATHTAKINGLY EXPENSIVE, WE CAN MAKE THE MONEY LAST LONGER, MAYBE UNTIL SHE WAKES UP OUT OF THE COMA.

WE CAN'T RISK MOVING HER RIGHT NOW.

WE MAY NOT HAVE A CHOICE. EVEN IF WE HAD MONEY, THE LONGER WE KEEP HER IN ONE PLACE, THE MORE CHANCE THAT SOMEONE WILL FIGURE OUT WHO *SHE* IS, AND WHO *YOU* ARE, AND THEN--

LET ME WORRY ABOUT THAT, MJ.

MEANWHILE, IF MONEY'S A PROBLEM, THEN I'LL JUST GET MONEY.

HOW?

I DON'T KNOW, BUT I'LL FIGURE SOMETHING OUT. SO WHAT'S NEXT AFTER THAT?

"I DON'T KNOW... I GUESS ALL WE CAN DO IS WAIT FOR THE INEVITABLE...

"...I SUPPOSE THAT'S ALL *ANY* OF US CAN WAIT FOR."

Amazing Spider-Man #543

SO. AUNT MAY.

ANYTHING NEW BY YOU?

BACK IN BLACK

PART 5 OF 5

An Incident on the Fourth Floor

I SHOULD MENTION, BECAUSE YOU WERE ASLEEP WHEN WE DID IT--

--AND I RECOGNIZE THAT YOU'RE ALSO ASLEEP WHILE I'M *SAYING* THIS, BUT WE'LL IGNORE THAT FOR THE TIME BEING AS A TECHNICALITY--

--ANYWAY, THE *POINT BEING*--

--THE OTHER DAY, WE TRANSFUSED SOME OF MY BLOOD INTO YOU. I THINK IT'LL HELP. I THINK IT'LL GIVE YOU A FIGHTING CHANCE.

I DON'T THINK IT'LL MAKE YOU SPROUT EIGHT ARMS AND LEGS, BUT WELL, YOU NEVER KNOW, RIGHT?

DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT, IT WAS JUST A *JOKE*. YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SPROUT EIGHT LEGS AND ARMS.

ON WHAT WE HAVE TO SPEND, WE CAN ONLY AFFORD SIX, TOPS.

WE SHOULD KNOW BY MORNING IF IT'S HELPED. I BELIEVE IT WILL. I KNOW IT WILL.

SO. I'VE TALKED ENOUGH. *YOU* TALK FOR A WHILE.

OKAY.

MAYBE LATER, THEN.

DO YOU SEE ANY CHANGE IN HER CONDITION?

MMMM... SHE SEEMS A LITTLE RUDDIER IN THE CHEEKS, BUT OTHERWISE, THERE'S NOTHING THAT I CAN TELL OFFHAND. WE'LL SEE WHAT THE BLOOD TESTS SHOW.

NO, I TOLD HIM IF HE WANTS TO GO OUT WITH ME, HE HAS TO MOVE OUT OF HIS MOTHER'S HOUSE, IT'S JUST NOT RIGHT, YOU KNOW?

I MEAN, HOW COME I ALWAYS END UP WITH GUYS LIKE THIS? IS THERE SOMETHING I'M NOT PAYING ATTENTION TO OUT THERE?

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND, PETER. WHY DIDN'T IT WORK?"

AS NEAR AS I CAN TELL FROM THE BLOOD WORKUP, SHE MUST'VE BUILT UP A RESISTANCE OR AN IMMUNITY TO MY BLOOD FROM THE LAST TIME I DID THIS. SO IT WAS JUST USELESS--

--USELESS.

SO WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP?

I DON'T KNOW, MJ...I DON'T KNOW THAT I *HAVE* A NEXT STEP, I--

NOK-NOK

YES?

MS. RILEY? REVEREND BILL WHITCOMB. I'M THE HOSPITAL CHAPLAIN. I'M HERE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR AUNT.

I APPRECIATE THE INTEREST, REVEREND, BUT TO BE HONEST WE'VE NEVER BEEN REALLY BIG BELIEVERS IN THE POWER OF PRAYER, SO--

THAT'S... NOT WHY I'M HERE.

THE STAFF KEEP ME INFORMED ABOUT PATIENTS THAT MAY BE ABOUT TO ENTER A TERMINAL PHASE IN THEIR TREATMENT, BECAUSE AS UNCOMFORTABLE AS IT IS FOR ALL OF US, NO MATTER HOW PAINFUL THESE THINGS MAY BE, WE MUST PLAN FOR THE FUTURE.

WILL YOUR AUNT BE REQUIRING LAST RITES? WOULD SHE WANT THE PRESENCE OF A REPRESENTATIVE OF ANY BELIEF OR DENOMINATION?

AND THOUGH WE ALL HOPE FOR A MIRACLE IN SUCH CASES...HAVE YOU MADE ANY ARRANGEMENTS YET FOR A FUNERAL?

YO, DELINT, I GOT SOMETHING FOR YOU.

UNLESS IT'S A BLONDE WITH LEGS THAT GO ON FOREVER, I'M NOT INTERESTED.

WE'RE FRESH OUT... HOW ABOUT AN OLD LADY WITH A GUNSHOT WOUND?

FILE CAME IN A FEW DAYS AGO, ENDED UP SITTING ON THE WHEN-WE-HAVE-TIME PILE.

LIEUTENANT, COME ON, DO I *LOOK* LIKE I HAVE TIME? I'M UP TO MY EARS HERE.

SO YOU GOT ALL THE ROOM TO THE *REST* OF YOUR HEAD, WHICH WITH A POINT THAT BIG IS ALMOST, LIKE, FOREVER.

IT'S A GUNSHOT WOUND WITHOUT ANY KIND OF POLICE REPORT, NO 911 CALL, NOTHING...HOSPITAL CALLED IT IN PER POLICY ON GUNSHOTS.

BROUGHT IN BY HER NIECE?

ACCORDING TO THE REPORT, YEAH.

SO UNLESS THE OLD LADY WAS CLEANING OUT A GUN WHEN IT WENT OFF, IF THE NIECE BROUGHT HER IN BUT DIDN'T WANT POLICE POKING AROUND, THEN MAYBE SHE OR SOMEBODY SHE KNOWS DID SOMETHING. MAYBE AN ACCIDENT, MAYBE DELIBERATE, WHO KNOWS.

THEY'RE ALSO PAYING FOR HER STAY IN CASH, WHICH MEANS THEY'RE *DEFINITELY* HIDING *SOMETHING.*

EITHER WAY, IT'S *YOUR* PROBLEM NOW.

DO YOU *BELIEVE* THAT GUY--

PETER--

HE'S A *VULTURE*, AND BELIEVE ME, I SHOULD KNOW, I'VE *FOUGHT* VULTURES BEFORE.

IT'S...A QUESTION THAT WE MAY NEED TO ANSWER, PETER. IF SHE DOES PASS AWAY--AND WE HAVE TO BE HONEST WITH EACH OTHER, THAT'S A REAL POSSIBILITY--

--NO--

WHAT WOULD SHE WANT US TO DO? WHAT KIND OF SERVICE?

YOU HAD A WHOLE LIFETIME OF KNOWING HER, PETER. WHEN IT COMES TO A SERVICE...WHAT DID SHE BELIEVE IN THE MOST? WHAT DID SHE BELIEVE IN, REALLY?

SHE BELIEVED IN ME.

AND THAT BELIEF MAY HAVE COST HER HER LIFE, MJ. HOW DO I LIVE WITH MYSELF IF THAT'S TRUE?

WE'VE GOT HER LOGGED IN AS A VICTIM OF A DRIVE-BY SHOOTING. THE NAME ON THE ADMISSIONS SLIP IS REILLY, BUT THE ONLY I.D. THAT WALKED IN WITH THAT NAME WAS A BIRTH CERTIFICATE.

HUH.

AND THAT'S NOT THE ONLY WEIRD THING.

BEEN TRACKING HER VITALS SINCE SHE GOT IN, AND IN THE LAST 48 HOURS THERE'S BEEN A CHANGE IN HER BLOOD REPORT.

I HAD TO GET A SECOND *COPY* BECAUSE THE *FIRST* ONE *CONVENIENTLY* JUST DISAPPEARED.

UH-HUH.

INTERESTING.

OKAY, I CAN'T MAKE HEADS OR TAILS OUT OF THIS...WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

IN THE LAST 48 HOURS, HER BLOOD COUNT CHANGED AND WE'VE DETECTED TRACES OF *RADIATION* IN HER SYSTEM THAT WEREN'T THERE WHEN SHE ARRIVED.

RADIATION?!

AND SOMETHING THE LAB CAN ONLY IDENTIFY AS A VARIANT OF SPIDER VENOM.

THE NIECE, MARY, HAS BEEN WITH HER ALMOST NONSTOP SINCE SHE WAS ADMITTED. WHO KNOWS *WHAT* SHE'S BEEN DOING IN THERE AT NIGHT WHEN NOBODY'S LOOKING?

SHE'S SUPPOSED TO HAVE A BOYFRIEND OR A HUSBAND, BUT NOBODY'S SEEN HIM ONCE.

YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT I THINK HAPPENED?

"MAYBE IT WAS A MISTAKE, MAYBE IT WAS DELIBERATE, BUT EITHER WAY, SHE GOT SHOT...I'M GUESSING BY THE HUSBAND-SLASH-BOYFRIEND.

"THEY PROBABLY FIGURED SHE WAS DEAD OR CLOSE TO IT. WHILE THEY WERE FIGURING OUT WHAT TO DO NEXT--

"--SHE GOT TO THE HOSPITAL SOMEHOW, MAYBE DROVE, MAYBE CABBED...YOU'D BE SURPRISED WHAT PEOPLE CAN DO WHEN THEIR ADRENALINE IS UP...BUT SHE WASN'T ALONE.

"THEY FIGURED SHE'D COME HERE AND TRIED TO FINISH WHAT THEY STARTED.

"HE TRIED TO GET TO HER, MAYBE FORCE HER TO COME BACK WHEN--

"--THE GUN WENT OFF, WHICH SCARED HIM INTO FLEEING.

"AND THAT'S WHY WE FOUND HER THAT WAY."

POSSIBLE. WHAT ELSE?

WELL, THEY LIED WHEN THEY SAID THEY FILED A POLICE REPORT ON THE DRIVE-BY SHOOTING. AND THEY'VE BEEN PAYING WITH CASH SINCE THEY GOT HERE.

THAT'S IMPORTANT BECAUSE ANY INSURANCE CARRIER WOULD WANT PROOF OF A DRIVE-BY, SO THEY'D CONTACT THE POLICE FOR CONFIRMATION. IT WOULD ALSO MEAN GIVING US AND THE INSURER HER FULL, *CURRENT* LAST NAME.

"SINCE THE OLD LADY WOULD RUIN THE WHOLE THING IF SHE WOKE UP, THE NIECE HAS BEEN HERE THE WHOLE TIME TO MAKE SURE SHE DIDN'T TALK--

"--AND MAY HAVE SLIPPED IN HER LOVER TO FINISH THE JOB WITH SOME KIND OF TOXIN WE HAVEN'T YET IDENTIFIED."

AND THEN, THE WAY SHE WAS ASKING ABOUT ANY CHANGES IN HER CONDITION TODAY, LIKE SHE ***KNEW*** SOMETHING--

WELL, IT'S NOT THE ***ONLY*** EXPLANATION, BUT IT MAKES SENSE AS A ***POSSIBLE*** EXPLANATION. AND NO TWO WAYS ABOUT IT, WHEN SHE DIDN'T FILE A POLICE REPORT AND LIED ABOUT IT ON THE FORM, THAT'S GROUNDS FOR SUSPICION AND PROBABLE CAUSE.

IT'S ALSO A FELONY OFFENSE ALL BY ITSELF.

SHE UP THERE NOW?

YEP. ROOM 430. END OF THE HALL.

THANKS.

OKAY...IF THE TRANSFUSION DIDN'T WORK, AND MEDICINE DOESN'T WORK, THERE HAS TO BE ANOTHER WAY TO--

PETER? WHAT IS IT?

TROUBLE, I--

MS. MARY REILLY?

YES...?

LIEUTENANT DETECTIVE ROBERT DELINT. I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR AUNT.

THIS...ISN'T A GOOD TIME, I NEED TO STAY HERE AND--

STAYING HERE IS OUT OF THE QUESTION, MA'AM, AND MAY IN FACT BE PART OF THE PROBLEM.

I DON'T--

ARE YOU AWARE THAT FAILING TO FILE A GUNSHOT REPORT, AND THAT GIVING MISLEADING OR INCOMPLETE INFORMATION IN RELATION TO A GUNSHOT INVESTIGATION ARE FELONY OFFENSES?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, I--

I'M AFRAID YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO COME WITH ME.

NO, I...I HAVE TO STAY HERE, I--

MA'AM, WE CAN DO THIS ONE OF TWO WAYS, WITH HANDCUFFS OR WITHOUT, AND I DON'T HAVE ANY--

--WHAT THE--

LIGHTS ARE OFF, BUT THE EQUIPMENT IS STILL WORKING. SOMEBODY WANTS IT DARK.

STAY HERE, MA'AM.

NO, WAIT, I--

SORRY, BUT I HAVE TO DO THIS.

LET HER GO.

POLICE! WHOEVER YOU ARE, I'M ORDERING YOU TO GET ON THE FLOOR.

NO.

GET ON THE FLOOR *RIGHT NOW!* I'M NOT GOING TO TELL YOU AGAIN!

YOU'VE GOT THAT RIGHT.

BLAM!

...OHMYGOD... PETER...

HE'S NOT DEAD, HE'S JUST UNCONSCIOUS, HE--

PETER...YOU ASSAULTED A POLICE OFFICER. YOU *KNOCKED* HIM *OUT*.

I KNOW.

All my life, I wondered what first step some of the criminals I'd fought had taken to become what they were.

Up to this moment, my criminality was a point of legal technicalities. I'd skirted illegality, done some questionable things...but this...

THIS...you get sent to jail for.

And they'd be right in doing so.

Until now, when they *SAID* I was a criminal, I knew they were wrong.

But now, for the first time, I *AM* all those things.

And there's nothing I can do about it.

OKAY, MJ, WE HAVE TO MOVE FAST. WE NEED TO GET YOU AND AUNT MAY OUT OF HERE, PRONTO.

BUT--

DON'T ARGUE. GET DOWNSTAIRS AND OUTSIDE, I'LL CALL ON THE CELL WHEN WE'RE READY TO MOVE.

NOW GO. I'LL BUY US SOME TIME.

Felony count number one: failing to file a police report on a gunshot wound.

Felony count number two: assaulting a police officer.

Felony count number three: wrongful imprisonment.

Can't use webbing, can't have this point to Spider-Man until well after May is clear.

Felony count number four: fleeing the scene of a crime.

--SO SHE'S BUSTING MY CHOPS BECAUSE I'M STILL LIVING AT MY MOM'S WHILE I BUILD UP THE OLD NEST EGG. IT'S NOT LIKE I *LIKE* IT OR ANYTHING, BUT YOU GOTTA DO WHAT YOU GOTTA DO FOR A WHILE, Y'KNOW?

I HEAR YOU.

ICE COLD
Coca-Cola
INSIDE

FJ39-88

SO I SAYS TO HER, I SAYS, FINE, IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT, GO, LEAVE, BE MY GUEST.

YOU KNOW WHAT SHE DID?

WHAT?

SHE LEFT. CAN YOU *BELIEVE* THIS?

UNREAL.

TELL ME ABOUT IT.

PASS THE MAYO.

Felony count number five: grand theft auto.

MJ, YOU READY?

JUST TELL ME WHAT TO DO.

Felony count number six: breaking and entering.

OKAY, MJ, I'M SET.

GO.

GOING.

OHMYGOD...NURSE! THERE'S SOMEONE ON THE FLOOR OF THE LOBBY...I THINK SHE'S HAVING A HEART ATTACK!

WHAT?

SHE'S TURNING BLUE!

CODE BLUE, ANY AVAILABLE DOCTORS TO THE LOBBY, CODE BLUE!

AUTHORIZATION FOR PATIENT TRANSFER

X_____

2A-5B

Don't have much time, he won't be out much longer.

AUNT MAY? IT'S PETER. I...I HAVE TO MOVE YOU NOW. I KNOW THE MACHINES ARE HELPING KEEP YOU ALIVE, BUT YOU JUST NEED TO HOLD OUT FOR A FEW MINUTES, THAT'S ALL.

IT'S DANGEROUS, BUT IF I LEAVE YOU HERE, IT'LL BE EVEN MORE DANGEROUS FOR YOU.

AND I HAVE TO... I HAVE TO TAKE STEPS TO MAKE SURE NOBODY SEES US, NOBODY INTERFERES.

And nobody...

...nobody ever wants to see a dead body being moved to the morgue.

Felony count number seven: reckless endangerment.

PETER?

IN HERE.

IS SHE--

SHE'S OKAY... HER HEART STARTED TO FALTER BUT I MASSAGED IT AND GOT EVERYTHING ELSE HOOKED UP.

YOU'VE GOT THE FORMS?

RIGHT HERE.

THEN LET'S GO.

WWHHHEEE-DOOOO-WHHHEEE-DOOOO-WHHHEEE-DOOOO

--THIS WASN'T CLEARED, I DIDN'T GET THE CALL.

I KNOW, THEY'RE UP TO THEIR EARS, ALL THE BEDS ARE FULL--

AND WE'RE NOT? WE'VE GOT PEOPLE STACKED UP TO THE CEILING--

OKAY, FINE, WHATEVER, WE'LL DEAL WITH IT SOMEHOW. PUT HER IN 12B UNTIL WE CAN FIND SOMETHING LONG-TERM.

WILL DO, THANKS.

HONESTLY, I DON'T BELIEVE SOME PEOPLE, NOT EVEN A CALL--

AUTHORIZATION FOR PATIENT TRANSFER

Felony counts number eight and nine: forgery and fraud.

x Ben Parker, M.D.

WE'RE GOOD TO GO?

ALL SET. NO PROBLEMS.

REST, NOW. YOU'VE HAD A BUSY DAY.

SORRY...I'M TRYING NOT TO CRY, BUT--

I KNOW.

I KNOW...

I DON'T MEAN TO BE SCARED, PETE, BUT I KEEP WONDERING...WHAT'S HAPPENING TO US? WHAT'S *GOING* TO HAPPEN TO US? WHERE IS THIS ALL GOING TO END?

I DON'T KNOW, MJ. I JUST KNOW WE CAN'T STOP FIGHTING. NOT FOR HER, AND NOT FOR US. NOT NOW, NOT EVER.

I HAVE TO GET GOING...HAVE TO DROP THE AMBULANCE OFF SOMEWHERE CLEAR ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN, MAKE SURE NOBODY CAN TRACK IT BACK TO THIS PLACE...AT LEAST FOR A WHILE.

AND THEN?

THEN... WE'LL THINK OF SOMETHING ELSE.

Nine felony counts.

Ten-year minimum per charge--

--equals a ninety-year prison term.

Possibly life imprisonment.

Nine felony counts.

Not committed by somebody in a mask that can't be tracked down.

Not committed by Spider-Man.

Nine felonies committed by ***ME***, with my fingerprints all over everything. Me. Peter Parker.

I can't say it was a trap, or a frame-up, or an anti-registration technicality, or anything else. I committed those crimes.

I have become the very thing I set out to fight. A criminal.

All my life, I've had nightmares about being accused of a crime and being sent to jail. And now I'm trapped in that nightmare, only this time it's real. It's ***REAL.***

I'm lost...God help me, I'm so lost...

Gurney Warren Reinhold Mott

THE END!!

TO BE CONCLUDED IN "ONE MORE DAY."

Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man #17

RIKER'S ISLAND.

AAH!

THIS IS POST 12. GET THE LIGHT ON THE YARD. I THOUGHT I HEARD SOMETHING.

SORRY! TRIPPED!

YOU SURE EVERYTHING'S OKAY?

KINDA TURNED MY ANKLE. FINE OTHERWISE.

'KAY. JUST CHECKING.

THAT'S GOOD.

RIKER'S SECURITY

CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL.

I HOPE WHEN THEY FINALLY NAIL HIS WEBBED BUTT, THEY DON'T TOSS HIM IN ANY FANCY GOVERNMENT HOLDING PEN. I WANT 'IM RIGHT ***HERE.***

GUY'S NO BETTER THAN ANY OTHER PERP. WHY TREAT HIM DIFFERENT?

HOW ABOUT 'CAUSE HE'S RESPONSIBLE FOR NAILING HALF THE GUYS WHO'RE IN HERE?

YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING ME. MAN, AIN'T YOU A LITTLE OLD FOR HERO-WORSHIPPING?

I'M JUST SAYING I ***SEEN*** SPIDER-MAN IN ACTION, AND I'D RATHER HAVE HIM CHASING ***BAD GUYS*** THAN HAVING ***GOOD GUYS*** CHASE ***HIM.***

WHAT DO YOU THINK? THAT IDIOT SPIDER-MAN: ***THREAT*** OR ***MENACE?***

GEE, THAT'S A TOUGHIE...

LEMME THINK!

S-SANDMAN! OH...OH GEEZ...

NOW THAT I GOT'CHER ATTENTION...

...WHERE'VE YOU GOT FLOYD BAKER STASHED?

BET "***THAT IDIOT SPIDER-MAN***" WOULD LOOK PRETTY GOOD TO YOU AROUND NOW, HUH.

LOOKING GOOD! STAY ON HIM!

SPIDER-MAN! YOU ARE UNDER ARREST! YOU CANNOT ESCAPE! STOP RUNNING IMMEDIATELY!

POLICE

I'M NOT RUNNING, GUYS! I'M WEB-SLINGING! DON'T THEY TEACH YOU ***ANYTHING*** AT THE POLICE ACADEMY, OTHER THAN ***NOT*** TO ACT LIKE ***STEVE GUTTENBERG?***

SANDBLASTED PART 1

THWIP

BUT, HEY... IF YOU WANT ME TO STOP HEADING FORWARD...

...WHO AM *I* TO QUIBBLE?

DAMMIT! WE *OVERSHOT* HIM!

BRING US AROUND! *BRING US AROUND!*

NY237K

POLICE

NYPD

AWRIGHT! AWRIGHT!

THERE HE IS!

I SEE HIM!

SPIDER-MAN! THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE TO--

--GARY, LOOK OUT! NEWSCOPTER!

AARRRHHH!!

PULL UP! PULL UP! IT'S THE COPS!

WTF NEWS

WATCH OUT!!!

THE STICK'S JAMMED!

OH MY GODDDDD--!!!!

HUH?

GEEZ, GARY, THAT WAS CLOSE. THAT WAS WAY TOO CLOSE.

I'M NOT PICKIN' UP SPIDER-MAN ANYWHERE. I... I THINK HE GOT AWAY.

NYPD

NYPD

WOW. WHAT A CRYIN' SHAME.

YEAH, I WASN'T GETTING TOO CHOKED UP ABOUT IT EITHER.

SANDMAN! PUT THE GUARDS DOWN AND BACK AWAY FROM THAT DOOR!

YOU THINK THAT DOOR'S GONNA STOP ME? I CAN GO RIGHT BETWEEN THESE BARS LIKE THEY'RE NOTHIN'!

NOT WITH THOSE *MEN*, YOU CAN'T!

THEN I'LL *BUST* IT OPEN!

BUT YOU'RE *NOT* KEEPIN' ME FROM FLOYD BAKER!

RIKERS

RIKERS PRIS

ARRRGH!

SPLOOSH

YOU THINK WE WEREN'T PREPPED FOR YOU, MARKO?!

WE'VE GOT FLOYD BAKER ON ICE, YOU DON'T THINK MAYBE WE FIGURED *YOU'D* TRY TO BREAK HIM *OUT!*

HE'S GLUB

HE'S INNOCENT!

TELL THAT TO THE HOMELESS GUY HE MURDERED!

HE DIDN'T MURDER HIM! HE AIN'T A MURDERER!

THEN IT'S TOO BAD HE CONFESSED TO IT, HUH?

GET BACK HERE, MARKO!

STAY ALERT! HE'S STILL DANGEROUS! HE COULD BE ANYWH--

AW, NUTS...

THAT'S JUST... GREAT.

Sorry... so...so sorry...

I tried...

I tried...

MIDTOWN HIGH. New York City.

108

HEY! REILLY! WHAT THE HELL YOU THINK YOU'RE DOIN'?

+SNORK+ HUH? WHAT?

WERE YOU SLEEPIN' IN HERE? IN MY OFFICE?

WHAT WERE YOU, HERE ALL NIGHT?

COACH THOMPSON

NO. NOT ALL NIGHT. JUST... *RECENTLY*... THAT'S ALL.

HOW'RE YOU GONNA BE MY ASSISTANT COACH IF YOU CAN'T KEEP YOUR *EYES* OPEN?

COACH

LOOK, I'M SORRY. I JUST, UH...

MY WIFE, UH...THREW ME OUT. SO I DON'T HAVE A PLACE TO CRASH RIGHT NOW. BUT I'LL FIND SOMEWHERE...

REALLY? OH. MAN, THAT *STINKS.*

WHY NOT JUST STAY AT A CHEAP *MOTEL* OR SOMETHING?

THAT, UH...THAT'S A PROBLEM...

MONEY ISSUES?

FREEZE!!!

I SAID FREEZE, PARKER! YOU CAN'T GET AWAY!

NO MATTER WHERE YOU TRY AND HOLE UP, WE'LL FIND YOU!

SURRENDER NOW!

MOTEL
CABLE TV
WEEKLY RATES
VACANCY

Soda

ICE

YEAH, FLASH. MONEY ISSUES.

ANYWAY... IT'LL SORT ITSELF OUT.

COACH

YEAH, I SUPPOSE IT WILL.

COACH

K-PAK

OOOOOFFF!!!

COACH

UH-OH.

So it *is* you. Had a feeling.

'Least you didn't nail me in the face this time.

I...I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEA--

SAVE IT, OKAY?

BOY, PETE, EVER SINCE YOU WENT PUBLIC, YOU TOTALLY *SUCK* AT KEEPING YOURSELF UNDER WRAPS.

HOW'RE YOU DOING THE DISGUISE?

SIGH IT'S A HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE PROJECTOR. PROBLEM IS, IT DOESN'T HAVE UNLIMITED POWER. NEEDS TO BE RECHARGED. SO I CAN'T USE IT ALL THE TIME.

YOU LIFT IT FROM STARK?

NO. GOT IT FROM... SOMEONE ELSE.*

HOW'D YOU KNOW IT WAS ME? OR DO YOU JUST *ALWAYS* TRY TO BOUNCE BALLS OFF YOUR ASSISTANTS' SKULLS?

*EDITOR'S NOTE: FOR DETAILS SEE FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD SPIDER-MAN #14. -STEVE.

A ZILLION LITTLE THINGS. THE WAY YOU TALK, LITTLE HAND GESTURES...

THAT'S... AMAZING, FLASH. I NEVER KNEW YOU WERE THAT OBSERVANT, TO--

PLUS, YEAH, ACTUALLY I *DO* ALWAYS TRY TO BOUNCE BALLS OFF MY ASSISTANTS' SKULLS. WHY DO YOU THINK THE POSITION WAS OPEN?

RIGHT. OF COURSE.

SO THE COPS ARE MAKING YOUR LIFE MISERABLE, HUH.

PRETTY MUCH.

MUST BE TOUGH. I HEAR THERE'S A PRICE ON YOUR NOGGIN.

I HEAR THAT, TOO. I FIGURE MAYBE I SHOULD TURN MYSELF IN TO GET IT. THAT'LL SOLVE MY MONEY PROBLEMS, AT LEAST.

HERE.

HERE *WHAT?* WHAT'S--?

--KEYS? DID I WIN A CAR?

EVEN *BETTER*: AN ALL-EXPENSE-PAID COUCH TO CRASH ON AT MY PLACE.

WH--? FLASH. THAT'S...MAYBE THAT'S NOT THE *BRIGHTEST* THING.

WHY? YOU SNORE?

COACH

FLASH, I'M A WANTED *CRIMINAL* BECAUSE OF THE REGISTRATION ACT. YOU HIDE ME AND THEY FIND OUT, THEY'LL PUT YOU IN A *WORLD* OF HURT.

I LOST *COUNT* OF THE NUMBER OF TIMES YOU LAID YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE, SAVING GUYS YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW.

WHAT KIND OF "*SPIDEY'S BIGGEST FAN*" WOULD I BE IF I DIDN'T STICK MY NECK OUT FOR YOU...AT LEAST A *LITTLE?*

FLASH, THAT'S...

ARE YOU SURE?

I'M FLASH THOMPSON. I'M *ALWAYS* SURE.

COACH

YOU GO HOME, "BEN."

327 NINTH AVENUE, APT. 4. GET SOME SLEEP. I'LL *COVER* FOR YA.

THAT...THAT'D BE OUTSTANDING. YOU SURE?

HEY... WHAT'RE FRIENDS FOR?

YOU SURE PROVED THAT. ALTHOUGH... HEY...YOU'RE NOT SETTING ME UP JUST TO GET THE REWARD MONEY?

EH. NOT WORTH IT. THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER DON'T GO AS FAR AS IT USED TO.

DON'T FORGET TO PUT ON YOUR "*BEN REILLY*" DISGUISE.

THANKS, MAN. YOU'RE THE BEST.

'BOUT TIME YOU REALIZED THAT.

LATER, "*PUNY*".

COACH

B-DEET

HELLO? YEAH, HI...FLASH THOMPSON HERE.

GOT SOMETHING I NEED TO TELL YOU... SOMETHING I THINK IS GONNA PAY OFF PRETTY BIG.

327 NINTH AVENUE, APT. 4.

I'm sorry, Uncle Ben...Aunt May...

I should've done *BETTER* by *BOTH* of you.

I did nothing at all... and you, Uncle Ben, died because of a guy I failed to stop.

Since then, I've been spending every waking moment doing my best...

And now with all that's happened...

The police, the army, everybody's after me...

What was the point? What was--?

Dammit.

sigh

Pictures in my wallet and the clothes on my back. That's all I have left.

Why did I ever go public with my i.d. ...?

But...maybe it wouldn't have made any difference. Tony, the Avengers, they all knew who I was. Soon as I turned against them, the same thing would've happened.

How long am I going to go on being punished for my original sin?

Maybe Mary Jane was right. I mean, even when things were going fine, she hated it when I said I was worried...

...worried that the ol' ***PARKER LUCK*** would run true to form and the wheels would just come right off.

She kept talking about *"self-fulfilling prophecies."*

Who knows? Maybe she was ri--

OH NO.

SPIDER-SENSE IS--

--TINGLIN'?

AIN'T THAT WHAT YOU ALWAYS SAY? "SPIDER-SENSE IS TINGLIN'."

YA MIGHT WANT TO KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT ABOUT THAT. PRETTY DUMB TO LET OTHER GUYS KNOW YOU GOT A BUILT-IN WEAPON LIKE THAT.

ESU

LACE

JETS

WHAT THE HELL ARE *YOU* DOING HERE, SANDMAN?!?

OH, YEAH, *THAT'LL* STOP ME.

COME ON, WILL YA KNOCK IT OFF?

YOU'RE ONLY MAKING THIS *HARDER*...

WELL EXCUSE THE HECK OUT OF ME IF I DON'T JUST ROLL OVER FOR YOU TO--

KRAK

LOOK, "SPIDER-MAN"!

I NEED YOUR HELP!!!

YOUUUU'RE KIDDING.

MAN, I WISH I WAS.

WERE. YOU WISH YOU WERE.

WHATEVER.

A GUY NAMED FLOYD BAKER IS IN THE SLAMMER ON A BUM RAP.

WHAT'S HE ACCUSED OF?

MURDERIN' A BUM.

OH. WELL... POINTS FOR BEING *LITERAL*, I GUESS.

'CEPT HE DIDN'T DO IT. I BROKE INTO THE D.A.'S OFFICE, READ THE WHOLE FILE...THE THING'S BOGUS.

OKAY, BUT... WHY SHOULD I *CARE?* MORE TO THE POINT, WHY SHOULD *YOU?*

'CAUSE HE'S MY DAD.

SO YOUR DAD'S A MURDERER. STILL NOT SEEING HOW IT'S MY PROBLEM.

BECAUSE I KNOW 'IM. HE MAY BE A LOSER, AND HE MAY HAVE DITCHED ME AND MY MOM WHEN I WAS A KID...

...BUT HE WAS A THIEF, A LOWLIFE... NOT A KILLER. HE GOT RAILROADED.

STILL NOT MY PROBLEM.

AW, C'MON! YOU GO AROUND HELPIN' TOTAL STRANGERS 24/7! AND I'M TELLING YA THAT THERE'S AN INNOCENT GUY GOING DOWN FOR SOMETHING HE DIDN'T DO, AND YOU'RE ALL "NOT MY PROBLEM!"

YEAH! THAT'S RIGHT. AND YOU KNOW WHY? 'CAUSE I DON'T BELIEVE YOU, THAT'S WHY!

SEE THESE TWO OLD PEOPLE? NEVER HURT ANYBODY! BUT THAT MAN DIED YEARS AGO AT THE HANDS OF GUYS LIKE YOUR FATHER! SO WHY SHOULD...

HEY! GIVE THAT BA--

THIS IS *HIM!*

HIM WHO?

THE BUM!

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT?!?

I SAW HIS PICTURE IN THE D.A.'S FILES. AT THE CRIME SCENE. THIS IS THE GUY WHO THEY SAID MY FATHER SHOT.

YOU ARE SO FULL OF--

I SWIPED THE FILES! GOT 'EM STASHED AWAY. I'LL SHOW 'EM TO YA. I SWEAR ON MY MOTHER'S *LIFE*, PARKER...

THIS GUY, RIGHT HERE, WHO YOU SAID DIED *YEARS* AGO...?

...THIS IS THE GUY WHO DIED IN AN ALLEYWAY A FEW *WEEKS* AGO.

Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man #17
Second Printing Variant
by Adi Granov

FOREST HILLS CEMETERY. SOME MONTHS EARLIER...

THANK YOU, SPIDER-MAN. THANK YOU FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT.

I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT. ONE MAN...IF HE'S THE RIGHT MAN...CAN MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE.

DENNY COLT

SO IF IT'S ALL THE SAME TO YOU, SPIDER-MAN OF THE YEAR 2211...

BEER

...I THINK I'LL STAY AROUND FOR A WHILE.

AWWW MAN...MAN, THIS IS MESSED UP, RIGHT HERE.

DUDE WON'T BE NEEDING THIS.

AND WHAT'S WITH THOSE *ARMS*? HOW FAKE ARE *THEY*?

WHOA! WHAT THE--?!?

WAIT! NO...! I...

NO! NO... PLEASE...!

TAKE ME WITH YOOOUUU!!!!!

HEY! YOU STUPID KID!

HOW MANY TIMES I GOTTA TELL YA TO STAY THE HELL OUT OF HERE!

THIS AIN'T YOUR FREAKIN' PLAYGROUND!

I SAID GET OUT!!

EWING

AND STAY OUT!

CRIPES.

CRAZY KIDS AND THEIR ART.

WHOLE GENERATION'S GOING STRAIGHT DOWN THE CRAPPER.

13TH PRECINCT, MANHATTAN. NOW.

YEAH... THAT'S HIM, ALL RIGHT.

SO OUR JOHN DOE HAS A NAME, HUH?

BEN PARKER. SO HOW'D BEN PARKER WIND UP AS A BUM? A STIFF IN A BACK ALLEY?

FOR THAT MATTER, WHY IS S.H.I.E.L.D. INTERESTED, AGENT, UH...

MADROX. JAMIE MADROX.

AND THIS IS MY ASSOCIATE, AGENT...SANDS.

WOULD IT INTEREST YOU TO KNOW, DETECTIVE COLLINS, THAT BEN PARKER DIED SOME YEARS AGO? YOU CAN CHECK YOUR RECORDS.

WHAT, SO...THIS *ISN'T* THIS PARKER GUY, THEN? OR MAYBE IT'S A TWIN BROTHER...?

NO TWIN BROTHER THAT WE KNOW OF.

I WAS HOPING YOU COULD SHED SOME LIGHT ON WHAT THE PERP, FLOYD BAKER, MIGHT HAVE SAID THE NIGHT YOU INTERROGATED HIM AND HE CONFESSED.

NOTHING MUCH TO SHED. GUY HAD SOME COCK-AND-BULL STORY. YOU'RE GONNA LOVE THIS:

CLAIMED THAT WHEN HE GOT THERE, THIS PARKER GUY WAS *ALREADY* SHOT. THAT HIS DYING WORDS WERE, "*I SHOT MYSELF.*"

'COURSE, IF HE'D DONE THAT, THE GUN WOULD'A BEEN THERE, RIGHT?

SO YOU NEVER *FOUND* A GUN. BAKER DIDN'T HAVE ONE ON HIM.

I'LL HANDLE THIS, SANDS.

NO, WE DIDN'T. TWO PATROLMEN SPOTTED BAKER IN THE ALLEY, ROLLING PARKER. THEY CHASED HIM DOWN A FEW BLOCKS. PROB'LY DUMPED IT IN A SEWER ALONG THE WAY.

HE KEPT SWEARING THAT WAS *ALL* HE WAS DOING--TRYING TO FIND SOME MONEY ON THE GUY. BUT YOU KNOW THESE TYPES.

AND THE "*CONFESSION*"?

OHHH, YOU'D BE *AMAZED* WHAT WE CAN GET FROM A GUY, 'SPECIALLY WHEN THE P.D. CAN'T GET A DEFENSE LAWYER DOWN TO HIM FOR A DAY OR SO.

I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE WE *WATERBOARDED* HIM OR NOTHING, BUT...WE GOT OUR WAYS. BET WE COULD TEACH YOU S.H.I.E.L.D. GUYS A THING OR TWO.

YEAH? HOW ABOUT I TEACH *YOU* A THING OR TWO?

WHA--!

I SAID WE WERE GOING TO PLAY THIS MY WAY!

SHUT UP! THIS CREEP STUCK MY FATHER IN JAIL--!

THIS ISN'T DOING ANYBODY ANY GOOD--!

SHOULD'VE KNOWN IT'S YOU, SANDMAN!

WORD JUST CAME DOWN: YOUR LOSER FATHER'S BEEN FAST-TRACKED FOR THE DIRT NAP! THANK GOD FOR ELECTION YEAR, HUH?

KILLIN' ME WON'T SAVE HIM! HE'S GOING DOWN IN TWO DAYS, AND YOU CAN'T DO JACK ABOUT IT!

EXECUTED? MY...MY DAD?

WE'LL FIND A WAY TO PROVE HE'S INNOCENT! I SWEAR! BUT THIS ISN'T THE--

UH-OH.

HI. YOU, UH...WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO HAVE A PLUG I COULD USE TO RECHARGE MY HOLOPROJECTOR, WOULD YOU?

SANDBLASTED PART 2

SPIDER-MAN! IT'S SPIDER-MAN!

Y'KNOW, THE WHOLE "KILLING YOU" THING...STILL SOUNDING PRETTY GOOD FROM HERE.

PUT HIM DOWN, SANDY! OR I'LL--

YOU'LL WHAT?

FREEZE!

DON'T MOVE!

YEAH, "MOVING" ISN'T EXACTLY AN ISSUE AT THE MOMENT.

AH. OKAY... THANKS...

NOW IF YOU GUYS'LL EXCUSE ME, I'LL JUST TAKE MY LEAVE OUT THE WINDOW AND--

THWIP

THWIP

OH. UH... OKAY...

YOU GUYS PLANNING ON INSTALLING ANY *WINDOWS* HERE ANYTIME SOON?

CRASH

NEVER MIND.

MARKO! NO!

BUT HE--

YOU SAID YOU WANTED MY *HELP* TRYING TO CLEAR YOUR FATHER! YOU DO THIS, YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN! *YOUR* CHOICE!

THIS AIN'T *OVER*, COLLINS. NOT BY A *LONG SHOT.*

NEXT TIME YOU BRING YOUR FAMILY TO THE BEACH...

...YOU *MIGHT* JUST FIND YOURSELF BURIED *HEADFIRST* IN THE SAND.

"YOU WERE SO RIGHT WHEN YOU PHONED ME, FLASH..."

THIS MEAL IS *DEFINITELY* PAYING OFF PRETTY BIG. THIS IS THE BEST WINE I'VE HAD IN AGES.

WELL, BETTY, I'M JUST TRYING TO GET THE PIECES OF MY LIFE BACK. AND YOU WERE A *GREAT* PIECE...

I...I MEAN A *HUGE* PIECE...I MEAN, YOUR *PART* WAS *HUGE*...

OH? *WHICH* OF MY PARTS IS HUGE?

ALL OF... I MEAN...

YEAH, I'LL CRAWL UNDER THE TABLE NOW...

FLASH... IT'S OKAY. I'M JUST MESSING WITH YOU.

RELAX. IT'S JUST ME. JUST BETTY BRANT...

...HAPPY TO SEE SOMEONE SHE THOUGHT WAS LOST TO HER FOREVER TURN OUT TO BE...

...A COMPLETE *DOOFUS*?

YES. BUT I CHOOSE TO FIND IT *CHARMING*.

SO TELL ME ABOUT THIS "*MISS ARROW*" PERSON.

WHAT ***ABOUT*** HER? SHE'S THE SCHOOL NURSE. NOTHIN' MUCH TO TELL THERE.

OHHHH, I DON'T KNOW. WHEN I MET HER, SHE LOOKED ***DAGGERS*** AT ME. LIKE SHE SAW ME AS A THREAT.

YOU ASK ***ME***, I THINK SHE'S GOT A LITTLE ***SOMETHING*** FOR YOU.

NAH. T'BE HONEST, I ASKED HER OUT A COUPLE TIMES. SHE TURNED ME DOWN FLAT.

NOTHIN' GOING ON THERE.

YOU NEVER KNOW. SOME GIRLS LIKE TO BE PURSUED.

AND, UH...WHAT DO *YOU* LIKE?

AT THE MOMENT? TO USE THE REST-ROOM.

THEN WE'LL ORDER DINNER. AFTER THAT... WE'LL SEE.

"WE'LL SEE." OOOOKAY...

FLASH THOMPSON, BACK ON THE PLAYING FIELD AND LOOKIN' GOOD.

I WAS MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS AND YOU PULLED ME INTO THIS, SANDY! I DON'T WANT ANY MORE REPLAYS OF WHAT JUST HAPPENED!

YEAH, YEAH, WHATEVER...

WHY'RE YOU ALWAYS *CROUCHING* ON STUFF? HOW COME YOU DON'T JUST STAND UP STRAIGHT?

BECAUSE I DON'T LOOK *COOL* JUST STANDING UP STRAIGHT...AND DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT.

THE SUBJECT IS THAT MY OLD MAN IS ON DEATH ROW, AND YOU'RE GIVIN' ME LIP ABOUT ME ROUGHIN' UP THE COP WHO HELPED PUT 'IM THERE!

WE'RE ON THE *CLOCK!*

YOU'RE ON THE CLOCK, MARKO. IF YOUR FATHER LIVES OR DIES, WHY SHOULD I CARE?

WELL, *YOU* TELL *ME*. WHAT WOULD YOUR *UNCLE BEN* SAY?

YOU DON'T GET TO MENTION HIM.

YOU UNDERSTAND? YOU *DON'T* GET TO MENTION HIM. HE WAS...

YOU JUST *DON'T*. GOT THAT?

YEAH. I GOT IT.

FACT, I GET MORE THAN YOU PROB'LY THINK I DO.

YOU WANNA GO? GO. YOU'RE RIGHT. THIS IS MY PROBLEM, NOT YOURS.

IT AIN'T WRITTEN IN ROCK... OR EVEN SAND...THAT YOU GOTTA HELP ANY SCHMUCK WITH A PROBLEM.

THAT'S TRUE. THEN AGAIN...

YOU'RE NOT JUST ANY SCHMUCK.

LOOK, MARKO... I DUNNO IF I'M GOING TO BE THAT MUCH HELP TO YOU ANYWAY.

I'M NOT A DETECTIVE. ALL I KNOW IS THIS:

THERE HAVE BEEN TWO UNCLE BENS IN MY LIFE. ONE SHOWED UP OUT OF NOWHERE SOME MONTHS BACK, AND THEN VANISHED.

AND THE OTHER?

HE'S STILL IN THE SAME PLACE HE'S BEEN SINCE HE DIED.

Y'SURE?

MIGHT AS WELL CHECK.

THE 7 TRAIN RUNS NOT FAR FROM HERE. WE CAN TAKE THAT STRAIGHT TO FLUSHING.

WOMEN

DEB, THIS REALLY *ISN'T* THE BEST TIME TO BE CALLING ME.

...

BECAUSE I'M ON A DATE WITH *FLASH*, THAT'S WHY.

NO, YOU *CAN'T* SAY HI. HE'S NOT WITH ME.

...

BECAUSE I'M IN THE WOMEN'S ROOM, AND THE RESTAURANT'S KIND OF STRICT ABOUT HAVING MALE COMPANY IN HERE, THAT'S WHY.

...

YES. THAT'S WHERE I AM.

I ANSWERED THE DAMN CELL BECAUSE IT RANG, OKAY? IT WAS *REFLEX.* I'LL CALL YOU LATER. YES. 'BYE.

SHEESH. OF ALL THE--

OWWW! ECHH!

SOMETHING... CRAWLING ON ME...

SPIDERS?!?!?

ACCCKKKKK!!

GET OFF ME!!! GET OFFFFFFFF!

EEEYARRRHHH!!

WHAT THE HELL...?

GET THEM OFF ME! GET THEM OFF ME!

AAAHHHH!!

BETTY! JEEZ! WHAT'S--?!

I'M MR. KAUFMAN, THE MANAGER. IS THERE A PROB--

A PROBLEM?!? A PROBLEM?!?!? YOU HAVE THE NERVE TO--

I'M GOING TO HAVE THE BOARD OF HEALTH *SHUT* THIS PLACE *DOWN*!!!

MADAME, I ASSURE YOU, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE--

THERE'S MAYBE A THOUSAND SPIDERS CRAWLING OUT OF THE TOILET!!!

CHECK! CHECK! CHECK! CHECK! CHECK! CHECK! CHECK!

WAITER! I NEED THE CHECK!

CHECK, PLEASE.

CHECK, PLEASE, AND *QUICKLY*.

WATCH WHERE YOU *STEP!* THEY'RE ALL *OVER* THE–

--PLACE?

I...I DON'T *UNDERSTAND.* THEY...THEY WERE *RIGHT HERE.* I...

I DON'T SEE ANY SPIDERS, MADAME. HOWEVER, I *DO* SEE...

...THIS.

I TAKE IT THIS IS *YOURS,* MADAME?

WH... WHAT? *NO...* I...

THIS IS A QUALITY ESTABLISHMENT, MADAME. WE DON'T APPROVE OF CUSTOMERS INHALING *NARCOTICS* IN OUR RESTROOMS.

THAT'S...*NUTS!* I DON'T *SNORT COCAINE!* THIS WASN'T SOME DRUG-INDUCED DELUSION! I--

IF YOU LEAVE *QUIETLY,* WITHOUT ANOTHER *WORD,* WE WILL NOT PRESS CHARGES.

BETTY, LET'S GO.

BUT...FLASH! I *DIDN'T...!* YOU... YOU BELIEVE ME, RIGHT...?

SURE, SURE I DO.

RIGHT OUT THROUGH HERE, MADAME, THANK YOU...

SORRY ABOUT THE *DISTURBANCE,* FOLKS. FALSE ALARM...BUT ALL MEALS ARE ON THE HOUSE.

IT'S ALL OVER.

SOME ARTICLE SAID YOUR UNCLE DIED WHEN YOU WERE A KID. THAT HE MEANT A *LOT* TO YOU.

CAN'T SAY I'M THRILLED EVERYBODY KNOWS EVERY DAMNED THING ABOUT ME.

WELCOME TO *MY* WORLD. MY LIFE'S ON THE BOOKS SINCE I WAS SIXTEEN.

PRIVACY'S THE FIRST THING T'GO WHEN YOU'RE A CROOK: KNOWIN' THAT COPS, LAWYERS, PAROLE OFFICERS ARE WATCHIN' YA, JUDGIN' YA.

IT *DOES* THINGS TO YA. MAKES YA *ANGRY* ALL THE TIME. Y'KNOW?

I... KIND OF *DO*...

BEFORE I UNMASKED, PEOPLE MIGHT HATE SPIDER-MAN... BUT HE WAS THIS...THIS *GUY* I CREATED. HE WASN'T PETER PARKER. SO WHO CARED? NOW...

NOW I'VE GOT *NO PLACE* TO HIDE. NOT PHYSICALLY, NOT *EMOTIONALLY*. AND IT...

GETS TO YA?

A *LITTLE*. YEAH.

AFTER A FEW YEARS, IT'LL GET TO YOU A *LOT*.

IT DON'T TAKE WEARING A MASK...OR TURNING YOURSELF INTO SAND...TO WIND UP BEING UNRECOGNIZABLE.

IT WAS POINTLESS COMING HERE.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WAS EXPECTING. AN OPEN GRAVE? IT'S--

--THAT'S WEIRD.

THERE'S FAINT *SINGE* MARKS ON SOME OF THE BLADES OF GRASS. LIKE SOMETHING WAS *BURNED* HERE A WHILE BACK. IT...

MY *SPIDER-SENSE* IS GOING OFF.

SOMEBODY *COMING?* THE COPS?

NO. THERE'S NO IMMEDIATE *DANGER.* IT'S SOMETHING *ELSE.* SOMETHING THAT I SENSE COULD BE...IMPORTANT.

I THOUGHT YOU ONLY HAD A NOSE FOR WHEN SOMEBODY'S TRYING TO POP A CAP IN YOUR HEAD. *THAT* TYPE O' THING.

THAT *USED* TO BE THE CASE. THEN STUFF HAPPENED.

YEAH? WHAT KINDA STUFF?

FOR STARTERS, I *DIED.*

YOU, UH... DIDN'T GET HIT IN THE *HEAD* REAL HARD ANY TIME IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS, DID YA?

HI. WE'RE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES, AND WE'D LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT...

WHA--?

HAVE...HAVE *YOU* COME TO TAKE ME TO THE *FUTURE?*

BECAUSE I AM *SO* READY.

I KNOW THAT HELMET!

WHERE DID YOU *GET* IT? WHO ARE YOU, ANYWAY?

MANOS THE HAND OF FATE

MY...MY NAME'S *DENNIS.* AND I GOT IT FROM SPIDER-MAN. FROM THE YEAR *2211.* MONTHS AGO.

KID, WHATEVER YOU'RE SMOKIN'...

NO, HE'S RIGHT. I *MET* THE GUY. HE SHOWED UP AT THE SAME TIME THAT OTHER BEN PARKER DID. THE ONE WHO WAS FROM ANOTHER TIME OR UNIVERSE OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

AND HE JUST...*GAVE* YOU THIS?

I...OKAY, TECHNICALLY, I NEVER *MET* HIM. I TOOK IT OFF 'IM AFTER THE WHITE-HAIRED GUY SHOT HIM DEAD. THEN HE JUST...VANISHED OR SOMETHIN'.

A MAN SHOT HIM?

YEAH.

DID THE OLD GUY LOOK LIKE THIS?

SANDMAN! KNOCK IT THE HELL OFF, RIGHT--

THAT'S HIM. SHOT HIM, LIKE, FOUR TIMES.

WHAT? BUT... THAT'S...THAT'S *IMPOSSIBLE*... HE'D NEVER...

WAIT...IF YOU NEVER MET HIM, *HOW* DO YOU KNOW HE CAME FROM THE YEAR *2211?* DID *HE* MENTION IT...?

NO. HE *NEVER* SAID. THE SPIDEY GUY, HE WAS ALL LIKE, "*I'M SPIDER-MAN, I'M HERE TO HELP,*" BUT THE OLD GUY CALLED HIM "*SPIDER-MAN FROM THE YEAR 2211*" AFTER HE KILLED 'IM.

I DON'T GET THIS. *HOW* WOULD THE OLD GUY KNOW? AND HOW COULD BEN PARKER BE *HERE* WHEN HE WAS *DEAD* IN THE ALLEY?

DID HE GO *BACK* TO THE ALLEY AND GET KILLED THERE?

MAYBE.

I WONDER IF THERE'S SOME SORT OF *RECORDING* DEVI--

WHOA!!! IT'S *TALKING* TO ME!

IDENTIFYING OPERATOR POSSESSING ARACHNO-DNA. OPERATOR ACCEPTED. AWAITING INSTRUCTIONS.

NEVER DID THAT FOR ME!

SHOW ME THE...THE LAST VISUAL RECORDINGS MADE BY PREVIOUS, UH...ARACHNO-WEARER.

COMPLYING.

MY GOD...IT *IS* HIM.

LOOK... HELMET...CAN YOU TELL ME...IS THIS GUY STILL ALIVE?

SCANNING TWO HUNDRED-MILE RADIUS FOR LIFE SIGN MATCH. SCANNING. SCANNING.

AFFIRMATIVE. TARGET LOCK VERIFIED. DOES OPERATOR DESIRE TO BE LED TO SUBJECT?

YOU BET YOUR AFFIRMATIVE BUTT I DO.

RING!
STILL

MIDTOWN HIGH, NEW YORK CITY.

SOME TIME AGO...

HELLO...?

IS ANYBODY *OUT* THERE? HELLO?

HELLO...?

HELLO.

PETER? *Uhm*...I MEAN... ***SPIDER-MAN?*** IS THAT YOU?

NOOO...

A.V. ROOM

OH, IT'S ***YOU!*** IS...IS MYSTERIO GONE?

MYSTERIO? THE GUY WHO TURNED THIS PLACE INTO A HAUNTED HOUSE?

YES! AND PETER...I MEAN SPIDER-MAN...TOLD ME TO WAIT HERE UNTIL HE CAME FOR ME. IS HE AROUND?

WELL...

NOT ***YOURS,*** NO.

I DON'T SEE 'IM, PRINCIPAL HARRINGTON. BUT THE SCHOOL'S BACK TO NORMAL.

SO...SO THE DANGER'S OVER?

ACCCKKKKK!!

UNHHHHH...

THUUUD

Hunh.

I'M GONNA HAVE TO CLEAN THIS *UP* NOW.

I HATE BEING A JANITOR.

FORTUNATELY, *THAT'S* GOING TO *CHANGE.*

SANDBLASTED CONCLUSION

QUEENSBORO BRIDGE...NOW.

THIS IS *RIDICULOUS!* THE BUNCH OF US IN A VAN. ALL WE NEED IS A TALKING GREAT DANE.

YEAH, WELL, THEN I GET TO BE FRED.

AND I'M SHAGGY.

SO THAT MAKES ME... WHO? ONE OF THE BROADS? NO WAY.

WELL, DENNIS HAS DIBS ON SHAGGY. ONLY ONE LEFT IS SCRAPPY.

"SCRAPPY." THAT'S A GOOD NAME. WHICH ONE'S HE?

THE OBNOXIOUS SAWED-OFF PUPPY.

...

I *hate* YOU.

DENNIS...AS SOON AS WE'RE OFF THE BRIDGE, HANG A LEFT.

I STILL DON'T GET WHY WE'RE BOTHERING WITH THIS GUY AND HIS VAN.

BECAUSE RIDING AROUND IN HERE, WE DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT COPS OR S.H.I.E.L.D.* SPOTTING US AND GIVING CHASE.

*STRATEGIC HAZARD INTERNATIONAL ESPIONAGE-- AWW, JUST LOOK IT UP ON THE INTERNET.

BUT WHY HAVE *HIM* DRIVING?!

HE VOLUNTEERED AND IT'S *HIS* VAN. BESIDES, *YOU* GOT A LICENSE?

NO.

ME NEITHER.

WHO *CARES* IF WE HAVE LICENSES? WE'RE BOTH *CRIMINALS!*

JUST BECAUSE WE'RE CRIMINALS DOESN'T MEAN WE GO AROUND BREAKING THE LAW.

BOY. YOU REALLY DON'T GET IT, DO YOU?

OH, I *GET* IT. I JUST DON'T *WANT* IT.

YEAH, DENNIS, RIGHT UP HERE.

I MEANT... *DENNIS!* WE'RE GOING THE *WRONG WAY* ON A ONE-WAY STREET!

WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU GOING?!?

YOU SAID MAKE A RIGHT!

NO, I SAID HANG A *LEFT!*

BUT THEN YOU SAID TO MAKE A *RIGHT* UP HERE!

HOW THE HELL YOU *BEAT* ME ALL THOSE TIMES, PARKER, I GOT *NO* CLUE.

I'M STARTING TO WONDER MYSELF.

AND WHY I THOUGHT YOU COULD HELP MY DAD...

"LOOK, SANDY, STOP WORRYING. WE GOT ANOTHER DAY OR SO UNTIL YOUR FATHER IS EXECUTED.

"THIS HELMET THING'S BEEN TALKING TO ME THIS WHOLE TIME. IT'S GOT A LOCK ON THIS UNCLE BEN IMPOSTER WHO KILLED THE SPIDEY FROM 2211 AND, PROBABLY, THE MAN IN THE ALLEY. IT'S GUIDING US RIGHT TO HIM."

"TELL ME, PARKER... HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S AN *'IMPOSTER?'*"

"BECAUSE UNCLE BEN... ***ANY*** UNCLE BEN, NO MATTER WHEN OR WHERE HE CAME FROM...WOULD ***NEVER*** KILL ANYBODY.

"I'M AS SURE OF ***THAT*** AS I AM THAT WE'LL SAVE YOUR DAD."

BAKER!

YOUR SENTENCE HAS BEEN MOVED UP TO *MIDNIGHT* TONIGHT.

WH-WHAT? WHY?

BECAUSE ACCORDING TO THE POLICE, SPIDER-MAN AND YOUR SON HAVE TEAMED UP TO TRY AND BREAK YOU OUT. SO WE RECEIVED A SPECIAL ORDER FROM THE JUDGE TO MOVE UP YOUR TIMETABLE.

MY SON? ***WILLIAM?*** I AIN'T SEEN HIM SINCE HE WAS A ***KID.***

YOU PROBABLY KNOW HIM BETTER AS FLINT MARKO. YOU KNOW...***SANDMAN.***

THE FATHER HERE WILL TAKE YOUR LAST CONFESSION, IF YOU WISH.

"FLASH...COME ON... YOU HAVE TO SPEAK TO ME SOMETIME."

"YOU'RE ALMOST HOME. THERE...HAPPY?"

FLASH

FLASH, YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY THINK THAT I'M SOME...SOME DELUSIONAL DRUG ADDICT.

I DUNNO WHAT I THINK, BETTY. YOU GOT US THROWN OUT OF THE RESTAURANT, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD.

I *DIDN'T!* IT WAS--

YOU KNOW... IF I DIDN'T KNOW BETTER, I'D THINK *MISS ARROW* HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT.

THE SCHOOL NURSE? AW, C'MON...

I'M *TELLING* YOU, SHE *DOESN'T* WANT US DATING!

GIMME A BREAK...

OH MY *GOD!* THERE SHE *IS!*

SHE'S *FOLLOWING* US!

STOP THE CAR! *LOOK* THERE!

WHAT? *WHERE...?*

BACK THERE, BY THE LAMPPOST!

MOVE, YOU'RE *BLOCKING* ME, I CAN'T S--

OOOOFF!!!

UNHHH!!!

7341

NEITHER OF YOU *MOVE!*

KEEP YOUR HANDS WHERE WE CAN SEE THEM!

THERE! RIGHT THERE! IT'S *HER* FAULT! HER, *BACK THERE!*

LADY, I SAID, *STAY* IN THE *CAR!*

BUT, FLASH...*LOOK!* SHE'S--

GONE...? HOW...HOW CAN SHE...?

OOOOOOF!!!

NO, WAIT! THIS...THIS IS ALL A *MISTAKE!* I'M *BETTY BRANT*, A REPORTER FOR THE *DAILY BUGLE!*

A REPORTER, HUH?

NEVER MUCH *LIKED* REPORTERS.

LEAST YOU'LL HAVE A HELL OF A STORY.

THIS... THIS *CAN'T* BE RIGHT.

THE GUY WE'RE HUNTING IS...IS HERE?

WHAT'S WRONG WITH *HERE?* WHAT *IS* THIS PLACE?

P S 108

IT'S *MIDTOWN HIGH!* IT'S WHERE I TEACH!

HEY, HELMET! YOU SURE THIS IS WHERE THE GUY'S HIDING?

AFFIRMATIVE. MURDERER OF PREVIOUS ARACHNO-OPERATOR IS WITHIN APPREHENSION RANGE.

SELECT PREFERRED METHOD OF JUSTICE TO BE ADMINISTERED.

WHAT'S IT SAYING?

IT SAID, "*SELECT PREFERRED METHOD OF JUSTICE TO BE ADMINISTERED.*"

WHAT THE HELL DOES THAT MEAN?

BEATS ME.

HOW ABOUT...I DUNNO...*POETIC* JUSTICE?

SELECTION ACCEPTED. PROCEED WITH APPREHENSION.

OKAY. WE'RE GOOD TO GO, I GUESS.

OUTSTANDING! LET'S--!

NO WAY, DENNIS!

BUT--

DENNIS, YOU'RE A GOOD GUY AND ALL, BUT WE'RE TRACKING A *MURDERER* AND THERE'S NO WAY I'M EXPOSING YOU TO THAT.

BUT I WANNA KNOW WHAT HAPPENS!

I SWEAR TO YOU, WHEN WE'RE *DONE*, I'LL COME BACK OUT AND TELL YOU.

PROMISE?

ABSOTIVELY.

BE CAREFUL, SPIDER-MAN!

AREN'T I *ALWAYS?*

NEVER.

WHO ASKED *YOU?*

WHAT DO YOU THINK HE'D SAY?

HE? HE WHO?

YOUR UNCLE... IF HE KNEW WHAT YOU'D DONE WITH YOUR LIFE, ALL 'CAUSE OF *HIM*. THINK HE'D BE PROUD?

WHY ARE YOU BRINGING THIS *UP*, MARKO?

JUST...THINKING ABOUT, Y'KNOW...FATHER FIGURES. DADS. AND MAKIN' 'EM PROUD. AND HOW SOMETIMES, NO MATTER WHAT, YOU...

NEVER MIND. NO REASON. JUST... *FORGET* IT.

YOU KNOW WHAT? YOU'RE MAKING ME *NOSTALGIC* FOR THE DAYS WHEN YOU WERE JUST TRYING TO *KILL* ME.

HEH. YEAH. GOOD TIMES.

I HEAR VOICES UP AHEAD. A MAN AND A WOMAN, I THINK.

I'M HAVING TROUBLE HEARING *ANYTHING* WITH THIS HELMET ON. HEY, HELMET...HOW MUCH FURTHER, AND HOW MANY PEOPLE?

ONE HUNDRED THREE FEET TO DESTINATION. REGISTERING TARGET PLUS MULTIPLE LIFE FORMS.

MULTIPLE? HOW MANY?

ELEVEN THOUSAND, TWO HUNDRED AND NINE.

WHAT?!?

OH YEAH, *THAT* WAS STEALTHY.

MMMMFFF!!!

WAM

WHO *IS* THAT!? *WHO'S* TH--?!?

OH! WELL... HELLO, PETER. BROUGHT A FRIEND, I SEE.

HELMET... WHAT'S GOING ON? THAT'S *ROGER*...THE *PRINCIPAL! IS HE* THE TARGET?

TARGET CONFIRMED. EMPLOY HELMET TO ADMINISTER JUSTICE.

I'M NOT ADMINISTERING *JACK* UNTIL I FIGURE OUT--

YOU WANNA STAND AROUND? FINE! NOT ME!

TELL ME WHAT YOU *KNOW* ABOUT THE DEAD GUY IN THE ALLEYWAY!

BLAM

OH, YOU WANNA *PLAY*? OKAY, FINE! *LET'S PLAY!*

MARKO! HOLD IT!!!

THIS CAN'T BE RIGHT! THE HELMET MUST'VE GONE HAYWIRE!

WHY YOU SAYING THAT?

'CAUSE IT SAID THAT HE HAD, LIKE, ELEVEN THOUSAND GUYS IN THE OFFICE WITH HIM! AND HE OBVIOUSLY--

HUNH.

I AIN'T GOT TIME TO TAP-DANCE AROUND WITH THIS GUY, PARKER!

HE CAME OUT READY TO FIGHT. SO HE'S GOT A FIGHT. THIS'LL SOFTEN 'IM UP TO TALK!

LAST CHANCE, SANDMAN! YOU--

IDIOT!

WE COULD HAVE *WORKED* TOGETHER, YOU AND I!

NOW LOOK WHAT YOU'VE GONE AND DONE!

WHO THE BLAZES *ARE* YOU?!?

WHO, ME?

WHY, I'M JUST YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD *SPIDER-MAN*...

...FROM THE YEAR *2211*...

OH, AND BY THE WAY...

shrnk

...I DON'T THINK YOU'LL BE NEEDING *THIS* ANYMORE.

BESIDES, IT WON'T DO YOU ANY MORE GOOD THAN IT DID YOUR *PREDECESSOR*... OR YOUR *SUCCESSOR*, DEPENDING ON HOW YOU LOOK AT IT.

SO *EASY* TO GET THINGS *MUDDLED* IN TIME TRAVEL, WOULDN'T YOU SAY?

COME ON, NOW! I HUNG AROUND HERE BECAUSE I WANTED TO SEE THE LEGEND CLOSE-UP!

PURELY A BONUS THAT I MET YOUR NEMESIS WHILE I WAS HERE...BUT *YOU'RE* THE ONE WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO MAKE IT *WORTHWHILE.*

THEN TELL ME *ONE* THING...

WHO THE HELL *ARE* YOU?

THWIP

YOU CAN DO IT! USE THAT *MIGHTY INTELLECT!* FIGURE ME OUT!

YOU'RE FROM THE FUTURE. *HIS* FUTURE. IT WAS THE *ONLY* WAY YOU COULD KNOW THAT THE OTHER SPIDER-MAN WAS FROM 2211.

RIGHT SO FAR.

AND SINCE THERE'S BEEN A FUTURE *SPIDER-MAN...* AND FUTURE *HOBGOBLIN...*

KEEP GOING. *ALMOST* THERE.

WHY *NOT* A FUTURE *CHAMELEON?*

WHY NOT INDEED?

ESCAPED FROM CONFINEMENT ALONG WITH POOR HOBGOBLIN... FORGOTTEN IN HER OWN TIME, BUT I WILL CARRY HER MEMORY *ALWAYS.*

"WHERE'S THE REAL ROGER, CHAMELEON?"

"THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IS DEAD. KILLED HIM AFTER THE WHOLE MYSTERIO BUSINESS."

I DIDN'T DO IT.

I SWEAR I DIDN'T.

YOU LIVED YOUR WHOLE LIFE AS A CROOK, BAKER. YOU'D THINK AT LEAST YOU'D DIE WITH HONEST WORDS ON YOUR LIPS.

"IS THAT HOW YOU *DUPLICATE* PEOPLE? BY *KILLING* THEM?"

"NO, BY INGESTING THEIR DNA. KILLING'S JUST THE EASIEST WAY TO GO ABOUT IT. NOW YOUR FRIEND, *SANDMAN,* WAS EASY... I GOT SOME SAND IN MY MOUTH."

"AND WHY DID YOU FRAME FLOYD BAKER?"

"I HAVE ABSOLUTELY *NO* IDEA WHO THAT IS."

HE'S MY *FATHER!* FACING THE CHAIR BECAUSE THEY THINK HE KILLED YOU!

NO, MARKO. *NOT* HIM.

IT *WAS* MY UNCLE WHO DIED... BELIEVE IT OR NOT, MY UNCLE FROM ANOTHER TIMELINE.

WHY *SHOULDN'T* I BELIEVE IT? IT'S NO NUTTIER THAN THE *REST* OF THIS.

THE POOR DEVIL WAS DRAGGED HERE BY THE HOBGOBLIN, AND THEN ABANDONED.

"AND HE HAD THE MISFORTUNE OF ENCOUNTERING YOU IN THAT ALLEYWAY, DIDN'T HE? BEN PARKER NEVER CARRIED A GUN IN HIS LIFE, SO YOU *MUST* HAVE HANDED IT TO HIM. TRYING TO CONVINCE HIM TO *USE* IT...ON OTHERS OR MAYBE EVEN HIMSELF.

"BUT HE DIDN'T *TAKE* IT. DIDN'T WANT ANY *PART* OF IT.

"SO *YOU* PICKED IT UP...

"AND FINISHED THE JOB THAT HE WASN'T READY TO TAKE.

"YOU SAMPLED HIS BLOOD... CHANGED YOUR SHAPE...AND LEFT HIM THERE TO DIE...

"...WITH FLOYD BAKER, THE WRONG MAN PASSING BY AT THE WRONG TIME, THE ONLY ONE TO HEAR HIS DYING WORDS AND--OF COURSE--MISUNDERSTAND THEM."

I...KILLED *MYSELF*...

YOU DON'T DISAPPOINT, SPIDER-MAN... OR SHALL I CALL YOU "*BEN REILLY?*" THAT WAS THE *MOST* CHALLENGING THING: NOT LAUGHING WHEN YOU CAME LOOKING FOR A JOB.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON ARE YOU THAT YOU WOULD--

PERSON?

PERSON?!

WHEN DID I EVER SAY I WAS A PERSON?

I'M COMING, SPIDEY! HANG--

ZOINKS!

AND TO THINK I WAS AFRAID OF YOU! SO AFRAID THAT I STAYED NEAR YOU AND WATCHED YOU IN SECRET...INSTEAD OF CHALLENGING YOU!

YOU WERE NEVER REALLY A THREAT TO ME! I SEE THAT NOW!

MY ABILITY TO BLEND WAS SO PERFECT, EVEN YOUR LEGENDARY SPIDER-SENSE NEVER WARNED YOU OF MY PRESENCE...JUST AS IT'S BLIND TO **HERS!**

HERS?! HER WH-- CCCCCH!

BUT ONCE I'VE DISPOSED OF YOU, I'LL BE ON MY WAY...AND OH, THE HAVOC I'LL WREAK! THE LEADERS I WILL IMPERSONATE! THE--

SPIDER-MAN! CATCH IT!

EH?

THWIP

HELMET! ADMINISTER JUSTICE!

ACKNOWLEDGED.

...NOW.

FORM OF JUSTICE CHOSEN: POETIC. JUSTICE IMPLEMENTED...

WELL...

...IT'S DONE.

BARBARIC. BARBARIC AND UNJUST. AND RISKY... WHAT IF THE WRONG MAN...?

PADRE, WITH ALL RESPECT, OUR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM WORKS. AND WHEN WE EXECUTE A MAN, WE'RE ABSOLUTELY ***SURE*** THAT HE'S THE ONE WHO--

WHAT THE...?!

WHO THE HELL IS THIS FREAK?!?

WHA... WHERE...?

OH GEEZ...I'M IN HELL.

HARDLY.

HEY. REMEMBER ME? FLINT MARKO.

HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE THAT WHOLE *CONEY ISLAND* MESS. DIDN'T FIND OUT 'TIL LATER THAT YOU HADN'T *DIED* THEN.

YEAH. SEEMS I GOT MORE LIVES THAN A *CAT*.

SO...*FLINT*... I...I HEAR YOU'RE...

...THAT I'M WHAT?

A SCREW-UP.

UNTIL FIVE SECONDS AGO, I WAS IN THE CHAIR.

WHAT? THAT WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BE 'TIL--

YEAH, WELL, THEY MOVED IT UP. SOMEONE WANT TO TELL ME WHAT *HAPPENED?*

IT WAS *SO COOL!* THERE WAS THIS MONSTER GUY! AND HE HAD THIS WHOLE EVIL PLAN! AND HE WOULD HAVE GOTTEN AWAY WITH IT, TOO, IF IT WEREN'T FOR--

SHUT UP, DENNIS.

YESSIR.

Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man #20

YOU ARE NOT LONG FOR THIS SPHERE, ERO...

CERTAINLY YOU ARE SENSING THAT BY NOW. YOU MUST REPRODUCE IF YOU ARE TO SURVIVE...

I KNOW THAT. AND I'VE DECIDED ON A HOST.

GOOD. BECAUSE THE LONGER YOU WAIT...

...THE MORE CHANCE THAT OUR NATURAL ENEMIES WILL ATTEMPT TO DESTROY YOU.

SO DO NOT TAKE OVERMUCH TIME IN MATING...

I WON'T. BY THIS TIME TOMORROW, FLASH THOMPSON SHALL BE MY MATE...AND MY HOST...

...AND AFTER THAT...

...MY SUSTENANCE.

I'M SO SORRY, AUNT MAY. I SHOULD HAVE...

...I SHOULD HAVE FOUND A WAY TO...TO SPARE YOU THIS...

I NEVER SHOULD HAVE UNMASKED. I NEVER SHOULD HAVE...

BUT...I WAS JUST TRYING TO DO THE RIGHT THING.

WHAT THE HELL KIND OF LIFE AM I LEADING, WHERE WHETHER I DO THE RIGHT THING OR WRONG THING, IT DOESN'T MATTER...

...BECAUSE THE PEOPLE I LOVE STILL SUFFER.

HEY! GOD! YOU LISTENING? WHAT THE HELL DO YOU WANT FROM ME?!?

I WANT YOU TO SHADDUP, WHOEVER YOU ARE!!

HOW ABOUT YOU SHADDUP.

AAAAAHHHH--!

GUY'LL PROBABLY BE CALLING THE COPS. BETTER GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE THE 403RD AIRBORNE OR SOMETHING LIKE *THAT* SHOWS UP.

THWIP

327 NINTH AVE. APT. 4

COMING! HOLD ON!

KNOK KNOK

OH. HELLO. I'M LOOKING FOR FLASH THOMPSON...

THIS *IS* HIS APARTMENT, RIGHT?

UH...YEAH. I'M, *UHM*...HE'S LETTING ME CRASH HERE.

SAY, DIDN'T I SPOT YOU AT THE BOOKSTORE SIGNING THE OTHER DAY?

YOU'VE GOT QUITE AN EYE FOR DETAIL.

YEAH. I DO. AND I NOTICED THAT YOU VANISHED WHEN SPIDER-MAN ARRIVED.

WELL, THAT VULTURE GUY SHOWED UP, SO I LIT OUT.

UH-HUH.

HEY! I DIDN'T INVITE YOU IN! THIS IS, LIKE, ILLEGAL ENTRY. I COULD CALL THE COPS.

BE MY GUEST. I'M ***ALREADY*** OUT ON BAIL. THEY'VE PROBABLY GOT A REVOLVING DOOR ON MY CELL.

LOOK, BETTY, I DON'T THINK THAT YOU SHOULD--

I DIDN'T INTRODUCE MYSELF.

YEAH, YOU DID, YOU--

WHY WOULD FLASH THOMPSON HAVE THIS HERE?

I...DON'T KNOW, YOU'D HAVE TO ASK HIM, IT--

MiSTie

HUH?

WHAT...HEY, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE DOING THAT...IT'S...

SHUT UP. JUST...OH, GOD, PETER, IT'S YOU...IT HAS TO BE...SOME SORT OF... OF IMAGE PROJECTOR OR SOMETHING, I BET, AND...

I...I'M SO SORRY. SO SORRY FOR EVERYTHING THEY PUT YOU THROUGH. SO SORRY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR AUNT.

IT...IT WAS MY FAULT...

IT WASN'T...

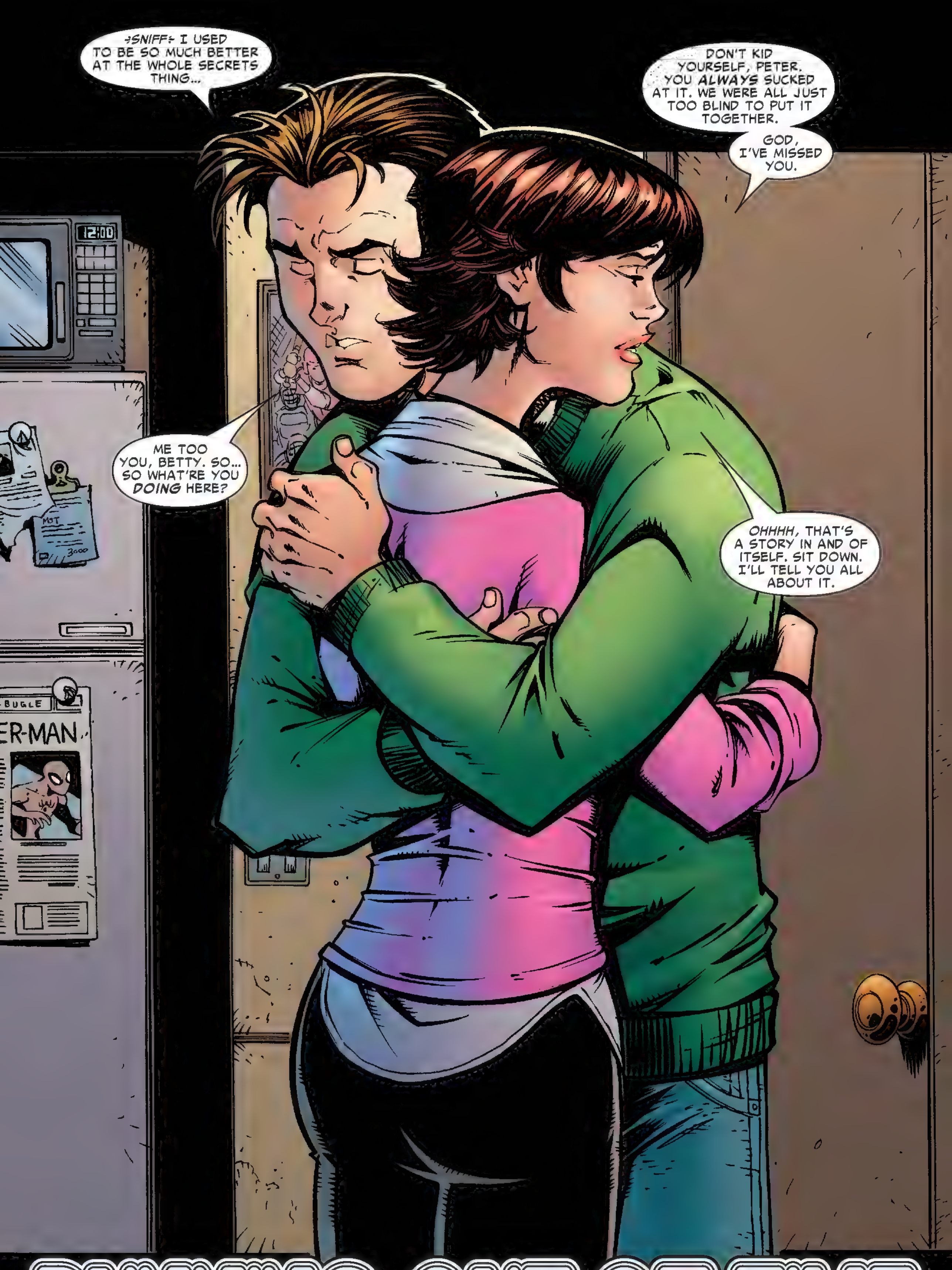
AW, BETTY, I'VE SCREWED UP EVERYTHING...

YOU COULDN'T HAVE KNOWN...

I SAW HER IN THE HOSPITAL JUST NOW...SHE LOOKS SO...

JEEZ, I MIGHT AS WELL HAVE PUT THAT BULLET IN HER MYSELF.

COME HERE, YOU IDIOT.


=SNIFF= I USED TO BE SO MUCH BETTER AT THE WHOLE SECRETS THING...
... DON'T KID YOURSELF, PETER. YOU ALWAYS SUCKED AT IT. WE WERE ALL JUST TOO BLIND TO PUT IT TOGETHER.
GOD, I'VE MISSED YOU.
ME TOO YOU, BETTY. SO... SO WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE?
OHHHH, THAT'S A STORY IN AND OF ITSELF. SIT DOWN. I'LL TELL YOU ALL ABOUT IT.
12:00
MJT
3000
BUGLE
ER-MAN
RUNNING OUT OF TIME

THANKS FOR THE LIFT, DOUBLE K.

HARDLY ANYBODY CALLS ME THAT ANYMORE, Y'KNOW.

THAT'S ME: FLASH THOMPSON, HARDLY ANYBODY.

NEWS

KBF AUTO BODY

WHEN DO YOU THINK YOUR DAD'LL HAVE MY CAR FIXED?

PERFECTION TAKES TIME, FLASH. YOU WANT IT TO LOOK ALL PRETTY WHEN YOU SMASH IT INTO ANOTHER POLICE CAR.

HAR-DE-HAR.

IN MY DEFENSE, I HAD A CRAZY LADY BLOCKING MY VIEW.

THIS "BETTY" YOU TOLD ME ABOUT? MAN, YOU SURE CAN PICK 'EM.

TRUE ENOUGH. DROP ME OFF UP HERE, WOULD'JA?

A BOWLING ALLEY. I SMELL A SETUP.

LANES

ACTUALLY...I'M COACHING MY HIGH SCHOOL BOWLING TEAM TONIGHT. AND WE'VE GOT ONE OR TWO GUYS WHO ARE GETTING WAY TOO SMUG...

AND YOU FIGURE HAVING SOME GIRL WALK IN AND ANNIHILATE THEM WILL TAKE 'EM DOWN A PEG.

KINDA.

FLASH! I DON'T HAVE MY SHOES, MY ARSENAL...

I'LL BUY YOU THAT NEW WOLFGANG PUCK COOKBOOK.

OKAY, FINE. BUT YOU'RE PAYING FOR THE RENTAL SHOES.

DEAL.

ANOTHER ONE?

WOMEN ARE LIKE WEEDS WITH HIM. I CHOP ONE DOWN, ANOTHER POPS UP.

WELL...MAYBE IT'S MY *OWN* FAULT. I'VE BEEN KEEPING HIM AT ARM'S LENGTH UNTIL I WAS READY TO...

ARRHHHH...

MY OVERSEER...WASN'T KIDDING...

MATTERS ARE MOVING FORWARD... *FASTER* THAN EXPECTED...

OKAY, THEN...

WHEN NATURE CALLS... ANSWER THE PHONE.

SO THAT'S ALL I KNOW. NOW... I NEED YOU TO BE HONEST WITH ME, PETER.

YOU MEAN IN A WAY I NEVER HAVE BEEN BEFORE?

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT.

ARE YOU SURE?

I'M SURE.

I DON'T GET IT. KNOWING MY IDENTITY...KNOWING WHAT I'VE KEPT FROM YOU...

WOULD YOU FEEL BETTER IF I *WERE* MAD AT YOU?

NO! GOD, NO. I JUST...I GUESS I WANT TO UNDERSTAND WHY YOU *AREN'T.*

BECAUSE ALL I CAN THINK OF IS HOW LONELY IT MUST HAVE BEEN FOR YOU. CARRYING THAT SECRET ALL THOSE YEARS, AFRAID TO INFLICT THAT BURDEN ON ANYONE ELSE.

AND BECAUSE...

BECAUSE, IN SOME RESPECTS...

I NEVER STOPPED LOVING YOU.

NOT EVER. NO MATTER WHO ELSE I WAS WITH... NOT *EVER.*

BETTY, I...I...

DON'T...SAY IT. DON'T SAY ANYTHING. YOU DON'T HAVE TO. IT'S ALL BEEN SAID, YEARS AGO.

WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE, OVER THE DAM, WHEREVER.

WE ARE WHAT WE ARE, AND I'M FINE WITH THAT. I REALLY AM. AND I KNOW YOU ARE, TOO.

SO...NURSE ARROW.

GO AHEAD AND TELL ME I'M BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE. HELL, TELL ME I'M *BARKING MAD*. I CAN TAKE IT.

I WISH I COULD.

BUT I'M STARTING TO WONDER MYSELF.

THERE'S SOMETHING GOING ON AT THE SCHOOL. AT FIRST I THOUGHT IT WAS LIMITED TO THE PRINCIPAL...BUT THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT.

AND IT MAY BE CONNECTED TO THOSE SPIDERS YOU SAW.

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN?* WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PRINCIPAL?

HE'S DEAD.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

A SHAPE-CHANGING VILLAIN FROM THE 23RD CENTURY TOLD ME.

AND TO THINK I WAS WORRIED *YOU'D* BELIEVE *I* WAS CRAZY.

BUT WHAT'S THAT HAVE TO DO WITH THE SPIDERS?

DON'T ASK ME HOW I KNOW...

...BUT I'VE GOT THE SICKENING SUSPICION THEY'RE SOMEWHERE *IN* THE SCHOOL...

...AND THAT THEY ATE HIS BODY.

AND...AND YOU THINK THIS IS CONNECTED TO ARROW?

SOMETHING SURE IS. EARLIER TODAY, I WAS IN FLASH'S OFFICE.

HE WAS TELLING ME ABOUT THIS HIDEOUS DATE HE'D HAD WITH SOME CRAZY LADY...

OH. WHICH... I GUESS WAS YOU, HUH...

AHEM. *SORRY.* ANYWAY...

"HE SAID HE WAS GOING TO BE DRIVING *'WHAT WAS LEFT'* OF HIS CAR TO A FRIEND'S DAD'S AUTO BODY SHOP...

"...AND SHE'D GIVE HIM A LIFT BACK TO THE CITY.

"AND SUDDENLY..."

FLASH...

UH-OH.

KLIK

OH...HI. YOU'RE...?

BEN REILLY. ASSISTANT COACH.

I'M ARROW. THE SCHOOL NURSE.

HAVE WE MET BEFORE, MR. REILLY?

YEAH, THE SNAPPY ENSEMBLE KIND OF TIPPED ME OFF.

I THINK I'D *REMEMBER* IF WE HAD.

YES. I SHOULD THINK I WOULD AS WELL.

SO! *FLASH!* UHM...I WAS THINKING...IF YOU'RE STILL UP FOR GOING OUT...THEN I'M GAME.

NO KIDDING?

NO KIDDING.

WHAT BROUGHT THIS ON?

HONESTLY? I SAW THE WAY THAT BETTY WOMAN WAS LOOKING AT YOU AND I GOT, WELL... A LITTLE JEALOUS.

HUNH.

DID FLASH AGREE TO GO OUT WITH HER?

HE COULDN'T TONIGHT. HIS VARSITY BOWLING SQUAD HAD PRACTICE. BUT THAT'S NOT THE PROBLEM.

WHEN ARROW SHOWED UP UNEXPECTEDLY, MY SPIDER-SENSE SHOULD HAVE WARNED ME BECAUSE I'M KEEPING MY I.D. UNDER WRAPS.

BUT INSTEAD I DIDN'T GET *ANY* HEADS-UP ON HER AT ALL. IT WAS LIKE SHE WAS A HOLE IN MY SPIDER-SENSE. LIKE MY INNER EYE WAS BLIND TO HER.

WHY WOULD THAT BE?

A COUPLE OF IDEAS COME TO MIND...NONE OF 'EM GOOD.

WHAT'RE YOU DOING?

SEEING IF I CAN FIND ANY INFORMATION ON HER. "*ARROW*" ISN'T MUCH TO GO ON, THOUGH.

THIS MAY SOUND NUTS...

MAYBE, BUT I BET IT'LL BE CONSISTENT.

DO A "*GOGGLE*" SEARCH ON "*ARROW*" AND "*SPIDER.*" SEE WHAT COMES UP.

MAYBE SHE'S... I DUNNO... A PROFESSIONAL SPIDER-TRAINER OR SOMETHING.

SHE'D BE PRETTY *AMAZING* IF SHE COULD TRAIN THEM TO ATTACK OUT OF TOILETS.

OOOOKAY. LESSEE. PICTURES OF AN ARROW-SHAPED MICRATHENA SPIDER.

AN ARTICLE CALLED "*UNPALATABILITY OF THE POISON ARROW FROG DENDROBATES PUMILIO TO THE CTENID SPIDER CUPIE--*" NEVER MIND.

THIS IS A WASTE OF--

PETER? WHAT'S WRONG?

Goggle

Do you mean: "Spider" "ero"?

THEY WERE THERE...IN STARK TOWERS...THEY...THEY ATE THE SKIN OF MY OLD BODY...

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

AND I REALIZED WHAT THEY WERE...

"PIRATE SPIDERS... MIMETIDAE FAMILY... GENUS: ERO...

"ALSO CALLED *CANNIBAL SPIDERS*, SINCE THEY FEED ON OTHER SPIDERS...

"AND THERE WAS THIS CREATURE...THIS THING MADE ENTIRELY OF SPIDERS...

"...SPIDERS OF THE GENUS: ERO...

"*ERO*...WHICH SOUNDS A HELL OF A LOT LIKE..."

ARROW! WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING HERE!

I...WELL, I REALLY WANTED TO GO OUT WITH YOU, FLASH, SO I WAS HOPING...

BOY-OH-BOY! WHEN YOU COME AROUND, YOU DO IT ALLUVA SUDDEN, DON'T'CHA?

C'MON. THERE'S SOMEBODY I WANT YOU TO MEET.

OHHH, I KNOW *ENOUGH* PEOPLE, FLASH.

WHOOOAAA...

WHOOOAAA...

WHOOOAAA...

WHOOOAAA...

WHOOOAAA...

WHOOOAAA...

THAT'S OUT-FREAKING-STANDING, MS. KULICK.

THANKS. BUT PLEASE, CALL ME--

MISS *LUCKY* SHOT?

EIGHT LUCKY SHOTS IN A ROW, WALTER? WITH SLIPPERY RENTAL SHOES AND A HOUSE BALL?

AW, SHADDUP.

I SHOOT LEFTY, MS. KULICK. WHO'RE THE BEST LEFTY BOWLERS?

OFF THE TOP OF MY HEAD? PARKER. PLUS HE'S A NICE GUY.

PARKER? YOU...YOU KNOW *PARKER?* HE *BOWLS*, TOO?

UH...YEAH. PARKER BOHN III.

OH. *RIGHT.* DUH.

WHY, WHO DID *YOU...?*

NEVER MIND. ARROW, THIS IS *KELLY KULICK*, PRO BOWLER. KELLY, THIS IS ARROW, SCHOOL NURSE.

CHARMED. FLASH, LET'S GO.

YOU'RE TAKING *OFF?* YOU'RE KIDDING...

NO!

YES. SORRY, BLONDIE.

BLONDIE?

COULD YOU SIGN THIS, MAYBE...?

BE RIGHT WITH YOU, NORM.

LOOK, FLASH... IT'S JUST...THINGS HAVE COME UP...I'VE GOT A NARROW WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY.

BUT...I CAN'T JUST *LEAVE...*

SURE YOU CAN.

LISTEN, YOU--

I DON'T THINK I WILL, THANKS.

DOUBLE K!

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!?

SHE'S FINE. LET'S GO.

OWWW! GEEZ, YOU GOT A GRIP LIKE A FREAKIN' VISE!!!

I'M TRYING TO GIVE YOU A SINGULAR HONOR, FLASH. NOW LET'S MOVE!

CRIPES, ARROW, CALM DOWN! YOU DON'T HAVE TO BITE MY HEAD OFF!

WELL... NOT YET.

LOOK, LADY! I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL HAS GOTTEN INTO YOU--!

I'LL BE HAPPY TO GET IT OUT OF ME WITH YOUR HELP.

BUT YOU JUST KNOCKED OVER MY FRIEND! NOW BEAT IT BEFORE--

FLASH...I REALLY DON'T HAVE TIME TO EXPLAIN IT ALL TO YOU.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE.

HEY! CRAZY LADY!

EH?

-GKKKH-

ATTARDI LANES

GET YOUR HANDS OFF--!

--HIM...?

HOLY...

A BOWLER, HUH? SO YOU LIKE GAMES, THEN. FINE.

LET'S PLAY!

ACCK!

ERO!!!!

OOOOOF!!!

KOOM

GO! EVERYBODY! GET OUT OF HERE!

SO...WE SEE EACH OTHER PLAINLY, NOW. WHERE'S THAT LOVELY ***HELMET*** YOU WERE WEARING THE OTHER NIGHT?

WENT DEAD AFTER THE CHAMELEON VANISHED. YOU AND HE WERE IN LEAGUE?

LET'S JUST SAY WE FOUND... COMMON GROUND.

MY, HOW YOU TALK. HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?

I WOULDN'T ***BE*** HERE IF YOU HADN'T VIOLATED THE NATURAL ORDER. IF YOU HADN'T CHEATED DEATH.

I AM YOUR NEMESIS... YOUR OPPOSITE NUMBER...YOUR SIGNIFICANT OTHER.

AND YOU DON'T GET RID OF ME ***THAT*** EASILY.

DAMMIT!

LET'S JUST SAY YOU GET TO GO ***BACK*** TO WHATEVER HELL SPIT YOU OUT.

ARE YOU SURE THE BOYS ARE GOING TO BE OKAY?!

POSITIVE! THEIR PARENTS WERE ALL THERE WATCHING PRACTICE, AND BESIDES, SHE'S AFTER ME!

WHY?

ANIMAL MAGNETISM! HOW SHOULD I KNOW?

REMEMBER WHEN I SAID YOU COULD PICK 'EM? BOY-OH-BOY...

NOT NOW, DOUBLE K, I AM SO *NOT* IN THE M--

NOW WHAT?!!

CRIPES!!!!

LET HER GO, ARROW! SHE'S GOT *NOTHIN'* TO DO WITH THIS!

VERY WELL, FLASH.

SHE'S GONE.

KBF

AUTO BODY

ARRRHHHHH!

HEEELLLLPPPPP!!!!

SP-SP-SPIDER-MAN!!!

GENERALLY IT'S ONLY A THREE-SYLLABLE NAME, BUT HEY, WHATEVER WORKS FOR YOU.

NOW GO HOME AS FAST AS YOU CAN.

WHAT ABOUT FLASH?!

LEAVE HIM TO ME.

OHHHH, MAN. WAIT'LL I TELL MACHUGA ABOUT THIS. HE'S GOING TO BE SICK WITH--

WHOA!!!

Ow.

Stupid slippery rental shoes.

OKAY, ERO! THIS TIME IT'S A DIFFERENT DANCE!

OH YEAH! YEAH, YOU BETTER RUN!

BECAUSE FLASH THOMPSON'S MY FRIEND! AND IF YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING TO GET AWAY WITH HIM, YOU'RE--

--YOU'RE--

--ABSOLUTELY RIGHT, APPARENTLY.

Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man #21

FREEZE!

DON'T MOVE!

YEAH, I KNOW WHAT "*FREEZE*" MEANS, BUT THANKS FOR THE CLARIFICATION.

NOW SHUT UP. I'M *CONCENTRATING.*

KEEP YOUR HANDS WHERE I CAN *SEE* THEM!

AUTO

KBF

AW, AND HERE I WAS GOING TO STASH THEM OUT OF SIGHT IN THE GLOVE COMPARTMENT.

KBF

C'MON, SPIDEY-SENSE. YOU'RE BIGGER. YOU'RE BADDER. YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO PICK UP MAJOR SPIDER-ACTIVITY, LIKE WHATEVER ERO HAS PLANNED.

REACH OUT. COME ON... COME ON...

YES! I...CAN *FEEL* IT! A SORT OF...OF FAINT VIBRATION IN...IN THE BASE OF MY SPINE... IT...

BZZT BZZT

NO...WAIT. IT'S COMING FROM MY BUTT.

THAT'S JUST NOT RIGHT.

OH... BRILLIANT.

PUT BOTH YOUR HANDS OVER YOUR HEAD! RIGHT NOW--!

BZZT BZZT

FLASH'S CELL PHONE, SET TO VIBRATE. MUST'VE FALLEN OUT OF HIS POCKET AND GOT WEDGED INTO THE SEAT.

I SAID, PUT YOUR HANDS--

KBF AUTO BODY

I HEARD YOU, I *HEARD* YOU.

HELLO.

KB THWIP

PETER! PETER, IT'S BETTY! IS FLASH ALL RIGHT? WHY ARE YOU ANSWERING HIS CELL PHONE? DID YOU GET TO HIM IN TIME?

OH GOD... SHE *TOOK* HIM? PETER, YOU HAVE TO FIND HIM.

ME? I'M BACK AT MY APARTMENT.

I HAD HIS CELL PHONE NUMBER IN MY ROLODEX HERE. WHERE ARE YOU? I CAN MEET YOU--

MR. FANTA BATTLE PLASTIC

TRAFFIC TIED UP BY RUBBER-NECKERS

NO! STAY PUT. ONE OF YOU IN TROUBLE IS ENOUGH.

MAYBE... MAYBE SHE'S BACK AT THE SCHOOL. BUT... NO, THAT WOULDN'T MAKE SENSE.

BUGLE REPORTER FOILS WEREWOLF ATTACK!

THINK! IS THERE ANYPLACE ELSE YOU KNOW OF THAT ARROW HUNG OUT? HER OWN PLACE, OR...

WAIT...*HUNG OUT!* YEAH! I...I FOUND THIS WEB COCOON, BUSTED OPEN AT A DECONSECRATED CHURCH THREE BLOCKS FROM MIDTOWN HIGH, WHERE I TEACH.

MAYBE IT'S HER "*PLACE OF POWER.*" ONCE HOLY, NOW NOT...

SHE CAME...*OUT* OF A *COCOON?* WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

YOU MEAN LIKE SOME RICH PEOPLE ARE MADE OF MONEY?

SHE'S MADE OF SPIDERS.

NOOOO. *LITERALLY.* SUPERNATURAL SPIDERS.

GEEZ, PETER, COULDN'T IT BE THAT SHE JUST *CONTROLS* SPIDERS? I MEAN...IT JUST SOUNDS SO BIZARRE.

HOW IS THAT ANY LESS BIZARRE THAN WHAT I'M TELLING YOU?

LOOK, WE'LL DISCUSS IT LATER. REMEMBER, STAY PUT.

I'VE CALLED FOR BACKUP! GIVE UP NOW AND YOU WON'T BE--

WHAT'CHA GONNA DO WITH ALL THAT JUNK? ALL THAT JUNK INSIDE YOUR TRUNK?

WHA--?

GIVE UP?

GIVE UP?

DO YOU HAVE ANY *IDEA* HOW *EASY* THAT WOULD BE FOR ME? *DO* YOU?

GIVING UP WOULD BE A *BLESSING!*

TO THROW MY HANDS UP! TURN MYSELF OVER TO YOU GUYS! ROT IN SOME JAIL CELL OR IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE OR WHEREVER!

THE IDEA OF "*GIVING UP*" SITS IN MY BRAIN LIKE A CANCER, TWENTY-FOUR/SEVEN, JUST... JUST GNAWING AWAY AT ME!

KRNCH

MAYBE IF I'D GIVEN UP *YEARS* AGO, MY AUNT WOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN A BULLET! MY WIFE WOULDN'T BE LIVING IN FEAR!

EVERYONE I'VE EVER LOVED HAS *SUFFERED* BECAUSE I WOULDN'T GIVE UP!

WOOM

WOULDN'T GIVE UP HELPING COPS OR CRIME VICTIMS OR INNOCENT PEOPLE!

WOULDN'T GIVE UP THE GOOD FIGHT!

GOD IN HEAVEN... YOU TALK TO ME ABOUT *GIVING UP?*

CAPTAIN AMERICA GAVE UP.

HE WOUND UP ON A *SLAB.*

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO *THAT?*

YOU'RE UNDER ARREST.

I GIVE UP.

OUT-FREAKIN'-STANDING.

FLASH.

UNHHHH...

DON'T WORRY. IT'S ALL GOING TO WORK OUT FINE.

HUH?!?

HOW IN THE NAME OF GOD IS THIS REMOTELY GONNA WORK OUT FINE?!?

WELL... IT WILL FOR ME!

Consuming Passions

LEMME GO! YOU'RE NOT EVEN HUMAN!

YOU SAY THAT AS IF IT'S A *BAD* THING.

FLASH, I KNOW THIS MAY ALL BE DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND--

IT'S *NOT* DIFFICULT! YOU'RE SOME KINDA *MONSTER*, AND SPIDER-MAN'S GONNA KICK YOUR BUTT!

I'M NO MONSTER. SPIDER-MAN IS.

HE DID SOMETHING ***UNNATURAL***, MOTIVATED BY PURE ***SELFISHNESS***. SPITTING IN THE FACE OF THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS...

WHAT'S MORE MONSTROUS THAN *THAT?*

YEAH? WHAT'D HE DO THAT WAS SO *WRONG?*

HE LIVED, FLASH.

THINK OF LIFE AS A CHECKING ACCOUNT. YOUR FRIEND IS OVERDRAWN.

I'M THE AUDITOR, HERE TO BALANCE THE BOOKS.

ARRRRHHHH!!

DAMN! THIS SHOULDN'T...BE SO PAINFUL...

MUST BE...*HUMAN* INFLUENCE...

I HOPE YOU BREAK YOUR *NECK*, Y'FREAK!

BETTY WASN'T CRAZY! *YOU* WERE THE ONE WHO ATTACKED HER IN THE RESTAURANT!

YOU MADE US CRASH THE CAR!

FLASH...THIS REALLY...*ISN'T* THE BEST TIME...

I'LL... BE WITH YOU...

...IN...

...A MOMENT...

What the...?

AHHHHHH!!! THEEEERRE IT IS!

HELLO, MY DARLINGS!

THERE'S YOUR DADDY.

SAY HELLO.

WHAT IS THAT THING! AND..."DADDY?" WE HAVEN'T--

YES, FLASH. I KNOW *WE* HAVEN'T.

PARTICULARLY... *YOU* HAVEN'T. WITH *ANYONE*. FOR *QUITE* SOME TIME.

AND BECAUSE YOU *HAVE* BEEN "OUT OF ACTION"...YOU HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF TANTRIC ENERGY BUILT UP WITHIN YOU.

THINK OF IT AS A SORT OF DIVINE POWER THAT PEOPLE EXPEND IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY PURSUITS.

SOMEONE IN A COMA SUCH AS YOU HAS A CONSIDERABLE BACKLOG STORED UP, LIKE UNBURNED CALORIES.

THAT'S WHY I WAS DRAWN TO YOU...

...BUT NEEDED TO KEEP YOU AWAY FROM OTHER WOMEN WHILE I WAS GESTATING.

"GESTATING?" YOU MEAN THAT'S--?

YES. AN EGG SAC. IT'S FINALLY READY.

WHEN IT HATCHES, IT WILL GENERATE *HUNDREDS* OF BEINGS LIKE ME. FAR MORE THAN WILL BE NEEDED TO DISPOSE OF AND DEVOUR SPIDER-MAN.

BUT IT'S AN ELABORATE PROCESS THAT DESTROYS THE HOST.

SO I FIGURED... BETTER YOU THAN ME.

YEAH, I'M NOT LIKING WHERE THIS IS GOING.

ACTUALLY, WHERE IT'S GOING--

--IS DOWN YOUR THROAT.

DON'T WORRY: IT'S *VERY* FLEXIBLE. IT'LL GO DOWN EASILY ENOUGH.

AND THEN I FREE YOU FROM THIS COCOON...

...AND THEN WE...CAN FINALLY BECOME ONE.

AW, GOD... GET AWAY... GET AWAY...

YOU'LL RELEASE YOUR TANTRIC ENERGY INTO ME...I WILL SIPHON IT BACK INTO YOU...

AND BY THIS TIME TOMORROW MY CHILDREN WILL HATCH, FULLY FORMED.

BUT... BUT WHAT ABOUT ME?

THEY'LL EAT YOU ON THE WAY OUT.

BUT YOUR SPIRIT WILL *LIVE ON* IN THEM.

C-CAN'T MY SPIRIT...KEEP LIVING ON IN *ME* INSTEAD...?

OPEN UP, FLASH.

FLASH...I'M NOT JOKING. OPEN YOUR MOUTH.

UNH UNH

FLASH! DO IT!

IF I HAVE TO RIP YOUR LIPS OFF AND KNOCK IN YOUR TEETH, I'LL DO IT! NOW *OPEN YOUR MOUTH!*

BOY, *THIS* IS A SWITCH. *USUALLY* IT'S A STRUGGLE TO MAKE HIM KEEP HIS MOUTH *SHUT*.

WHA--? HOW DID YOU *FIND* ME--?!?

DIVINE INTERVENTION.

UH-OH...

HOW SWEET OF YOU, PETER, TO COME ALL THE WAY HERE...

...SO THAT YOU CAN PROVIDE A MEAL FOR MY HUNDREDS OF NEWBORNS!

SNAK

SNAK

SNA

THEY WANT A MEAL? FINE! HOW ABOUT OMELETS?! 'COURSE, IN ORDER TO MAKE 'EM...

...I'LL HAVE TO BREAK A FEW HUNDRED EGGS! *YOURS*, I'M THINKING!

DAILY BUGLE

BACK IN BLACK?

THE INTERNET IS A GLORIOUS THING, ROBBIE. I'VE ALWAYS SAID SO.

NOOOO, YOU'VE ALWAYS SAID IT'S THE DOMAIN OF HACKERS, TRAITORS, AND MORONS.

WHATEVER.

LOOK AT THAT. IT'S A THING OF BEAUTY. MAKES ME WANT TO SHED A TEAR.

WENT UP ON *U-TUBE* TEN MINUTES AGO. THOUGHT YOU'D WANT TO SEE IT, MR. JAMESON.

YOU THOUGHT RIGHT.

I WANT YOU TO FIND THIS VIDEO GUY. GET HIS STORY EXCLUSIVE FOR US. FIND OUT ANYTHING ELSE HE MIGHT'VE SEEN, HEARD...

NO.

"*NO?*" I'M SORRY, ROBBIE, DID I MISS A MEMO ABOUT MY NO LONGER BEING THE PUBLISHER AND... OH, WHAT'S THE WORD... BOSS?

JONAH, HOW ABOUT, JUST ONCE, CUTTING THE KID A BREAK?

A BREAK? "*THE KID*" HOSED US FOR YEARS, ROBBIE! MADE FOOLS OF US, SELLING US PICTURES OF HIMSELF! AND I SHOULD CUT *HIM* A BREAK?

JONAH, WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT, HUH? HE'S UNMASKED, HE'S ON THE RUN, HIS AUNT IS HOSPITALIZED...

CAPTAIN AMERICA IS *DEAD*, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!

HOW DID *HE* GET INVOLVED IN THIS? I HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH TH--

YES, YOU DID!!!

YOU AND EVERY BLOWHARD WHO COULDN'T SEE THESE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN FOR THE SELFLESS HEROES THEY ARE!

NELSON

YOU SPENT YEARS STOKING PUBLIC SENTIMENT AGAINST THEM, JONAH! *YEARS!* IT MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN *YOUR* FINGER ON THE TRIGGER!

AND IT'S *MY* FAULT, TOO, BECAUSE I WASN'T ABLE TO STOP YOU!

"HE HOSED US FOR YEARS." MY GOD, JONAH, WHAT WERE YOU, *STUPID? BLIND?* HOW COULD YOU *NOT* HAVE *KNOWN?*

HOW MANY *"COINCIDENCES"* WERE NEEDED FOR PETER AND SPIDER-MAN TO HAVE BEEN TWO DIFFERENT PEOPLE? IT'S INSANE!

OCCAM'S RAZOR, JONAH. SIMPLEST EXPLANATION. AND YOU MUST HAVE KNOWN IT DEEP DOWN. MUST HAVE. I KNOW I DID.

BUT YOU LOVED THE CIRCULATION BOOST. YOU LOVED THE MONEY.

SO YOU CHOSE NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT. DIDN'T LOOK TOO CLOSELY.

LOOK NOW!

WHAT'RE YOU--? GET YOUR HANDS OFF--

LOOK, DAMMIT! LOOK AT WHAT'S ON THAT SCREEN!

THAT'S NOT A *STORY* OR A *CIRCULATION BOOSTER* OR *DOLLAR SIGNS!*

THAT'S A *MAN* AND A *CO-WORKER* AND MAYBE EVEN, HEAVEN FORBID, A FRIEND, AND HE'S IN A WORLD OF PAIN!

SO HOW ABOUT, JUST FOR ONCE, WE DON'T ADD TO IT.

BUT YOU DO WHAT YOU WANT.

YOU'RE THE BOSS, AFTER ALL.

NEVER THOUGHT I'D BE GLAD TO SEE THESE STUPID STINGER THINGS AGAIN.

WHAT...YOU THINK THEY JUST "*HAPPENED*" TO SHOW UP NOW?

IDIOT.

THEY ONLY EMERGE WHEN YOU FACE SOMEONE LIKE ME... SOMEONE WHOSE BEING IS ROOTED IN PRIMAL FORCES OF CHAOS AND DARKNESS.

NOT SURPRISING THAT YOU'D BE REPULSED BY THEM WHILE I *REVEL* IN THEM. AFTER ALL, I *AM* YOUR OTHER.

FEMALE TO YOUR *MALE*. *DARK*-SKINNED TO YOUR *LIGHT*.

STRENGTH TO YOUR *WEAKNESS*.

DON'T FORGET *CHUNKY* TO MY *CREAMY*.

LADY...YOU DON'T KNOW *JACK* ABOUT ME.

WHAT I'VE ***BEEN*** THROUGH... WHO I *AM*.

YOU THINK I'M ***AFRAID*** OF DARKNESS?

ERO...

WHAM

IT'S WHERE I LIVE!

ARRHHHH!!

WRONG. IT'S WHERE I LIVE!

YOU'RE JUST PASSING THROUGH!

SHUNK

THE POISON IN MY STING WOULD *KILL* ANYONE ELSE. *YOU*, IT WILL SIMPLY SLOW DOWN...

...SAP YOUR STRENGTH...

STILL... STILL HAVE *ENOUGH*... TO...

OH, *DO* SPARE ME.

UNHHH!!!

KRAKOA

GET UP, PETE! YOU CAN TAKE HER!

SHE'S GOT NOTHIN'! *NOTHIN'*! YOU THE MAN! YOU'LL ALWAYS BE WORTH A HUNDRED OF HER!

A HUNDRED OF ME. THAT'S VERY SWEET, FLASH.

IN FACT... HERE'S THE THING. PETER WOULDN'T BE *NEARLY* AS EFFECTIVE A HOST AS YOU.

ONLY A HUNDRED CHILDREN WOULD RESULT RATHER THAN THE THOUSANDS YOU'D SPAWN.

BUT THAT WOULD BE *MORE* THAN ENOUGH. PLUS, THEIR BIRTH WOULD ENSURE HIS DEATH.

I SHOULD *NEVER* HAVE INVOLVED YOU AT ALL, FLASH. I *SEE* THAT NOW.

OKAY, PETER...OPEN THE TUNNEL...

HERE COMES THE CHOO-CHOO.

YEAH?

J. JONAH JAMESON
PUBLISHER

KNOK
KNOK

I'M SORRY.

REALLY?

I HANDLED IT BADLY...AND IN PUBLIC, WHICH WAS...*INAPPROPRIATE*. I SAID THINGS I SHOULDN'T HAVE. I APOLOGIZE.

GOOD.

YOU'RE FIRED, ROBERTSON.

GET THE HELL OUT OF MY BUILDING.

AND CLOSE THE DOOR.

J. JONAH JAMESON
PUBLISHER

KLIK

Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man #22

JOE! HI, HONEY!

YOU'RE HOME EARLY!

PAINTED HILLS

OH, MY GOD...YOU'RE HOME *EARLY.*

WHAT HAPPENED? BOMB SCARE? ANTHRAX?

WHO *DIED?*

PLEASE, DON'T TELL ME TOMBSTONE IS BACK OR--

NOTHING LIKE THAT, MARTHA.

IS IT *YOU?* ARE YOU FEELING CHEST PAINS? OR--

I FEEL FINE.

THEN WHAT...?

I'VE BEEN LET GO.

FROM WHAT?

FROM MY JOB, MARTHA. JONAH FIRED ME.

BWAAHAAAHHAHAAHAHAHA...!

MARTHA...?

I'M SORRY... I'M SORRY, HONEY... IT'S JUST...

WHEN I THINK OF ALL THE *HORRIBLE* THINGS IT COULD HAVE BEEN...

WELL, THIS *IS* PRETTY BAD...

JOE, THAT MAN HAS BEEN LIKE A *CANCER* ON YOUR SOUL FOR AGES NOW.

DAY AFTER DAY OF YOUR DEALING WITH HIM... I HAVE *NO* IDEA HOW YOU MANAGED IT.

IT'S PROBABLY TAKEN YEARS OFF YOUR LIFE.

HE'S DONE YOU A FAVOR.

TO PARAPHRASE GENERAL PYRRHUS, A FEW MORE FAVORS LIKE *THIS* AND I'M UNDONE.

HEY, DAD! YOU'RE HOME EARLY...!

OH GOD. YOU'RE HOME EARLY. WHAT *HAPPENED?*

HE'S YOUR SON, ALL RIGHT.

JONAH FIRED YOUR DAD, RANDY.

WHAT? *WHY?*

WAIT, LEMME GUESS: JONAH WAS CHORTLING OVER THAT VIDEO THAT'S ALL OVER U-TUBE, AND YOU SNAPPED AND TORE HIM A NEW ONE.

WELL, HE'S *YOUR* SON TOO, JOE, OBVIOUSLY, *DESPITE* MY OCCASIONAL CLAIMS INVOLVING SIDNEY POITIER...

THIS ISN'T A JOKE, MA. DAD, ARE YOU GONNA TAKE THIS?

I DON'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE, RANDY. THE MAN CAN HIRE AND FIRE WHOM HE WANTS.

YOU COULD SAY IT WAS *RACIAL.*

LIE, YOU MEAN.

IT'S JUST UNFAIR THAT PETER PARKER SHOULD COST YOU YOUR JOB!

PETER? IT WASN'T *HIS* FAULT.

IT SURE IS. IF HE'D NEVER UNMASKED, NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED.

THIS IS ON HIS HEAD.

GET OFF...MY HEAD...!

IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT, PETER. YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S PROLONGING THIS.

AND, FRANKLY, I HAVE TO SAY THAT YOU'RE BEING *VERY* INCONSIDERATE.

PREDATOR/PREY

THERE'S A CORE CONCEPT INVOLVED YOU DON'T SEEM TO UNDERSTAND--

THE SPIDER'S TIME IS *LIMITED* ON THIS WORLD, IN *ALL* THINGS.

I ONLY HAVE A BRIEF PERIOD IN WHICH I CAN REPRODUCE. THIS IS MY WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY...

LET... GO...OF ME...

THAT'S IT? THAT'S ALL?

THE *BEST* THAT THE GREAT QUIPSTER CAN COME UP WITH IS "*LET GO OF ME*"?

THE POISON I'VE PUT INTO YOUR SYSTEM IS ONLY SUPPOSED TO PARALYZE YOUR BODY, NOT YOUR SENSE OF *HUMOR*.

OKAY, ARROW, *YOU WIN!* YOU WANT TO SHOVE THAT DOWN MY THROAT? FINE! DO IT!

I WON'T FIGHT YOU ON IT!

THAT'S VERY HEROIC OF YOU, FLASH. *VERY* HEROIC.

BUT *EVENTS* HAVE PASSED YOU *BY*, DEAR HEART.

ALL RIGHT, PETER. YOU FINALLY SEEM *RELAXED* ENOUGH.

YOU CAN TAKE SOME SOLACE IN THE IDEA THAT AT LEAST YOU'RE GOING *OUT* WITH A *BANG*.

BLAM

MY BABIES! MY...MY...

YOU!!!!

BLIND FEAR

YOU'VE BEEN IN MY FACE SINCE WE *MET*, LADY.

KA-CHAK

RIGHT BACK AT'CHA.

BLAM

THIS IS FOR GETTING ME ARRESTED!

KA-CHAK

BLAM

THIS IS FOR THREATENING PETER AND FLASH! AND THIS--

KA-CHAK

BLAM

THIS IS FOR MAKING ME AFRAID OF TOILETS!

BLAM

Okay...memo to me...*never* piss off Betty Brant.

BETTY! G...GET OUT... SHE'LL...

I DON'T THINK SHE'S GOING TO DO *ANYTHING*, PETER. LOOK.

YOU... YOU *HURT* HER. HOW...?

WAIT...ARE THOSE...?

SILVER BULLETS WITH CROSSES IN THEM. I FIGURED, Y'KNOW, THE OPPOSITE OF *UNHOLY* MIGHT WORK, SO WHILE I WAS HOME I GRABBED--

YOU HAVE A *SHOTGUN* AND *SILVER BULLETS* AT HOME?!

I'M A REPORTER FOR THE *DAILY BUGLE*. I'VE SEEN STUFF THAT WOULD FREAK OUT KOLCHAK.

GIRL'S GOTTA BE PREPARED.

THEN PREPARE FOR THIS...BETTY...

PREPARE TO SLEEP WITH THAT THING...UNDER YOUR PILLOW...

...IN FACT... PREPARE *NOT* TO SLEEP...AT ALL...

BECAUSE... I'LL BE WATCHING... WAITING...

AND AS SOON AS YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES...YOU'LL HAVE SPIDERS UNDER YOUR EYELIDS...

...UP YOUR NOSE... DOWN YOUR THROAT...

WHEN YOU TRY TO SCREAM... YOU'LL JUST VOMIT UP SPIDERS...

THAT'S YOUR FUTURE...WHAT THERE IS OF IT. WHATEVER YOU *MAY* HAVE BEEN UNTIL NOW...THAT'S *OVER*. NOW YOU'RE JUST PREY, AND I'M YOUR PREDATOR.

HAAAHAHAHAHAHAAAA

I think I just puked a little inside my mouth.

OHHHH, NO, SHE DOESN'T. SHE DOESN'T GET AWAY AFTER *THAT* SPEECH.

PETER, NO! YOU'RE--

I'M FINE. I'VE ALMOST SHAKEN OFF HER VENOM...

"*ALMOST*" ONLY COUNTS IN HORSESHOES!

WHY *IS* THAT, ANYWAY? WHO MADE THE HORSESHOE RULES AND DECIDED "*ALMOST*" SHOULD COUNT FOR SOMETHING?

AND WHILE WE'RE AT IT, HOW COME CLAMS ARE THE GOLD STANDARD OF HAPPINESS? AND CUCUMBERS, THE ARBITERS OF COOL?

I...I DON'T KN--

OH, ***HOLD*** IT! THIS IS WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR ***ENEMIES!*** YOU YAK IT UP SO THEY'RE DISTRACTED!

I'M ***NOT*** YOUR ENEMY, PETER! I'M ***CONCERNED--!***

AND SHE *IS* MY ENEMY.

AND *I'M* CONCERNED ABOUT YOU.

THIS ENDS *TONIGHT!*

WAIT! TAKE THE GUN! PETER!

YOU HOLD ON TO IT! IF SHE DOUBLES BACK, COMES AFTER YOU... I DON'T WANT YOU DEFENSELESS!

I'LL BE FINE! I--

DAMMIT, PETER! DON'T BE SO FREAKING PIGHEADED! PETER--!

ACHHH!!! MEN!!!

UHM...SPIDEY? BETTY? A LITTLE *HELP* FOR YOUR OLD PAL FLASH?

OKAY... Y'KNOW WHAT? YOU GUYS ARE BUSY. I'LL JUST WAIT UP HERE.

ERO!!!...

GET AWAY FROM ME! YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS HAVE DONE *ENOUGH!*

MY BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN ARE DEAD!

I CAN *NEVER* REPRODUCE! NEVER LEAVE ANYTHING OF MYSELF BEHIND, ANY LEGACY!

THE ONLY THING LEFT TO ME IS THE PROSPECT OF REVENGE!

IF YOU HAVE A SHRED OF DECENCY, AT LEAST ALLOW ME TO *SAVOR* THAT FOR A WHILE!

LADY, YOU ARE ONE *TWISTED* SISTER, YOU KNOW THAT?

I ADMIT, ON OCCASION, I'VE FOUND THAT *ATTRACTIVE* IN A WOMAN. YES, FELICIA, *WHEREVER* YOU ARE, I MEAN *YOU.*

BUT IN *YOU*...NOT SO MUCH.

ANYWAY, WHEN YOU DID THAT WHOLE *"WEAK/STRONG"* RIFF ON ME, YOU FORGOT ABOUT *"QUITTER"* VERSUS *"NEVER GIVES UP!"*

WELL, GUESS WHICH ONE I--

AW, *PEANUTS.*

Y'KNOW, EVER SINCE FOX CANCELLED *"DRIVE,"* IT'S BEEN ONE PIECE OF BAD LUCK AFTER *ANOTHER.*

YOU SHOULD HAVE *QUIT* WHILE YOU'RE NOT *TOO* FAR BEHIND, PETER! YOU'RE LOOKING UPON THE FACE OF YOUR NATURAL PREDATOR.

I WAS WILLING TO GIVE YOU A *RESPITE* WHILE I HEALED...

...AND RETURNED TO FULL-STRENGTH...

UNFFFFF!

YOUR DEATH WOULD HAVE BEEN INEVITABLE...BUT YOU WOULD HAVE HAD MORE TIME WITH YOUR LOVED ONES...

...MAYBE EVEN BEEN AROUND LONG ENOUGH TO BID GOOD-BYE TO YOUR FRAIL OLD AUNTIE.

OOOOO... STRIKE A NERVE?

HATE COPING WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU *KILL* WHATEVER YOU *LOVE?*

GETTING IN *RANGE* OF ME? YOU IDIOT!

SNAK

YOU CAN'T HURT ME WITH THAT! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?

SHOWING YOU SOME *LOVE*.

KRAA ASH

YOU'VE LOST, ARROW. YOU'RE DEAD. YOU JUST DON'T KNOW IT YET.

YOU GAVE ME THE CLUE YOURSELF, WITH ALL YOUR TALK ABOUT PREDATORS.

MADE ME THINK ABOUT *YOURS*. AND WHEN I SAW WHERE WE WERE FLYING OVER...

WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT? WHERE--?

THE CENTRAL PARK ZOO.

SPECIFICALLY...

...THE AVIARY.

WHA--

NO!!!

LOOK ON THE FACE OF *YOUR* NATURAL PREDATOR, YOU MONSTER.

THE BIRDS MAY BE FEASTING ON YOU...BUT *I'M* THE ONE WHO SERVED YOU UP ON A PLATTER.

GET AWAY! GET AWAY!!!

AND WHEN YOU WIND UP BACK IN WHATEVER HELL SPAT YOU OUT, YOU TELL THE ONES WHO SENT YOU...

YOU TELL THEM THAT, FOR EVERYTHING THEY'VE PUT ME AND MINE THROUGH...

I'M COMING FOR THEM.

AND I'LL FIND A WAY TO TAKE THEM DOWN.

BECAUSE *THAT'S* WHAT SPIDER-MAN DOES.

HE *ALWAYS* FINDS A WAY.

DEADPOOL

...IF THE POLICE COME 'ROUND, INVESTIGATING THE DISAPPEARANCE OF NURSE ARROW...

DON'T WORRY, ERO...

I'LL TELL THEM IT WAS *FOWL PLAY.* THAT "*QUIPSTER*" ENOUGH FOR YOU?

SKRNCH

"FOWL PLAY." JEEZ, PETE, YOU SHOULD BE *ASHAMED.*

327 NINTH AVENUE, APT. 4

YOU THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER, THOMPSON? *YOU* BE SPIDER-MAN.

WHO'S BETTY TALKING TO?

CHECKING HER VOICE MESSAGES.

MAN, I FEEL SO *LOUSY* ABOUT HOW I TREATED HER. I WANT TO MAKE IT UP TO HER.

GOOD THING I GOT PLENTY OF TANTRIC ENERGY TO DO IT WITH.

FOR SOME REASON, I'M *RELIEVED* I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

I'M GONNA GO SHOWER. YOU EXPEND YOUR "*ENERGY*" HOWEVER YOU--

MY... GOD.

WHAT IS IT?

NO WONDER MY VOICE MAIL-BOX WAS FULL.

BETTY, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD, WHAT--?

LIKE HELL. I'M GETTING SHOWERED, CHANGED...

...AND THEN JONAH JAMESON AND I ARE GOING TO HAVE A LONG OVERDUE...*CHAT.*

JONAH FIRED ROBBIE ROBERTSON. THEY HAD THIS HUGE ARGUMENT ABOUT... ABOUT *YOU,* PETER...

AND HE FIRED HIM. JUST LIKE THAT. ROBBIE'S OUT.

Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man #23

BROOKLYN, N.Y.

KNOK KNOK

WHO'S THERE?

J. JONAH JAMESON.

J. JONAH JAMESON *WHO?*

YOU'RE ***HILARIOUS***, RANDY. NOW OPEN UP. I WANT TO TALK TO YOUR FATHER.

WHY? WANT TO ***FIRE*** HIM SOME MORE?

HOW ABOUT YOU JUST OPEN THE DAMNED DOOR.

HOW ABOUT I RUN YOUR WRINKLY BACKSIDE TO THE SIDE--

WHOA? WHAT HAPPENED TO *YOU?*

RAN INTO A DOOR.

NOW WHERE'S YOUR FATHER?

RANDY, WHAT'S GOING...?

OH GOOD *LORD*, JONAH, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?

SAYS HE RAN INTO A *DOOR.*

RIIIIIGHT.

COME IN AND LET ME PUT SOME ICE ON IT.

I DON'T NEED ICE, MARTHA. I NEED TWO GLASSES AND YOUR HUSBAND.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO? FIRE HIM SOME *MORE?*

REPETITION? THAT'S JUST LAZY HUMOR. YOU PEOPLE *REALLY* NEED NEW WRITERS.

"YOU PEOPLE?" MEANING WHAT?

DON'T PARSE WORDS, RANDY. I'VE BEEN DOING IT *LONGER* AND I'M *BETTER* AT IT.

NOW WHERE'S...?

JONAH? WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?

SAYS HE RAN INTO A DOOR.

RIIIIIGHT.

AND HE CALLED US "*YOU PEOPLE.*"

ROBBIE, IF IT WOULDN'T BE TOO MUCH TROUBLE FOR YOUR WIFE AND THE REVEREND HERE...

...COULD WE TALK *PRIVATELY?*

JOE, MAYBE IT'S NOT THE WISEST THING TO--

IT'LL BE OKAY, MARTHA. WHAT'S HE GOING TO *DO?* FIRE ME SOME *MORE?*

+SIGH+

GLASSES.

PLEASE.

UNLESS YOU JUST WANT US TO DRINK IT OUT OF THE BOTTLE.

POP

I'LL GET THEM, JOE. YOU SIT. TALK. I'M SURE IT'LL BE...INTERESTING.

AND MR. JAMESON...YOU GIVE MY DAD TROUBLE, WE *PEOPLE* HAVE *LOTS* OF DOORS AROUND HERE.

VEILED THREATS TO A MIDDLE-AGED MAN. QUITE THE YOUNG *TURK* YOU'RE RAISING HERE, ROBBIE.

HE'S ALREADY RAISED, J.J.

SO HE IS.

SO WHAT'S GOING ON, JONAH? WHY ARE YOU *HERE?* WHO DID THIS TO YOU?

THREE OF THE FIVE *"W'S."* YOU FORGOT *WHERE...*

...AND *WHEN.*

THE DAILY BUGLE... EARLIER THAT DAY...

DAILY BUGLE

"HOW COULD YOU HAVE *DONE* IT?"

IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, MS. BRANT.

ROBBIE WAS LIKE A *BROTHER* TO YOU!

MORE THAN THAT...HE WAS YOUR *CONSCIENCE!*

I HAVE MY *OWN* CONSCIENCE, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

I WOULDN'T BET THE FARM ON THAT.

AH JAMESON BLISHER

AND I WOULDN'T BET THE FARM THAT YOU'LL HAVE A JOB A MINUTE FROM NOW, YOU KEEP THIS UP.

I FIRED JOE ROBERTSON. WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I'D *HESITATE* TO FIRE YOU?

YOU KNOW WHAT? MAYBE IT'S WORTH MY JOB TO SAY WHAT'S ON MY--

--MIND?

FIGHTING WORDS

JJJ

WHAT'S IT SAY?

IT SAYS, "YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT ME. I'M WORTHLESS SLIME."

REALLY?

NO.

"421A BROADWAY. SIX P.M. JUST TO TALK. COME ALONE."

"YOUR F.N.S-M."

"FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD SPIDER-MAN."

THANK YOU, MS. BRANT, BECAUSE I *JUST* BLEW INTO TOWN AND HAD *NO* IDEA WHAT THAT STOOD FOR.

ARE YOU GOING TO GO?

DO *YOU* THINK I SHOULD WALK INTO THE SPIDER'S PARLOR?

MAYBE AFTER EVERYTHING YOU'VE SAID ABOUT HIM OVER THE YEARS, YOU THINK YOU OWE IT TO HIM.

WHY WOULD I THINK THAT?

I DON'T KNOW.

MAYBE YOUR CONSCIENCE.

421A

LIEBER'S GYM

421A

PEOPLE *KNOW* I'M HERE, PARKER!

IF I DON'T REPORT BACK TO MY OFFICE IN AN HOUR, THE POLICE WILL BE ALL OVER THIS PLACE!

YOU WANT TO SEE ME? *YOU* COME OUT *HERE!* BECAUSE OTHERWISE I'M STAYING PUT, AND THERE'S NOTHING YOU--

UH-OH.

THWIP

421

AAAAHHHH--!

SLAM

YOU'RE JUST GIVING ME MORE FODDER FOR MY *LAWSUIT*, PARKER!

I'LL *BURY* YOU FOR THIS! I'LL--

BURY ME?

JONAH... THAT'S NOTHING NEW. YOU'VE BEEN DIGGING MY GRAVE FOR YEARS.

NOW ALL THAT'S LEFT IS FOR YOU TO DANCE ON IT. OR SPIT IN IT, WHICHEVER.

YOU LIKE THE PLACE, BY THE WAY? BELONGED TO A CRIME BOSS I BUSTED AWHILE BACK. SAT EMPTY ALL THIS TIME.

FIGURED IT'D BE A GOOD PLACE TO...*CHAT*.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?
YOU FIRED ROBBIE ROBERTSON.
YES.
BECAUSE OF ME.
YES.
REHIRE HIM.
WHY SHOULD I?
BECAUSE THERE'S A MOUNTAIN OF CRAP YOU'VE DONE OVER THE YEARS THAT YOU *CAN'T* UNDO.
TONS OF MISTAKES THAT YOU HAVE TO LIVE WITH BECAUSE THERE'S NO GOING BACK.
AND BELIEVE ME, I'M THE EXPERT ON THAT TOPIC.
BUT THIS...
THIS YOU *CAN* FIX. SO...
FIX IT.
NO.
WE *DONE?*

WHAT DO YOU *WANT* FROM ME, JONAH?

THIS ISN'T ABOUT YOU.

IT'S *ALWAYS* ABOUT ME. WHAT DO YOU WANT?

TALK TO MY LAWYER.

TALK TO *ME*.

ANYTHING I'D SAY TO YOU IS ALREADY IN THE COURT PAPERS.

HOW ABOUT "*THANK YOU?*" IS *THAT* IN THE PAPERS? YOU COULD TRY SAYING THAT.

"*THANK YOU?*"

SEE? THAT WASN'T SO HARD.

WHY THE HELL SHOULD I THANK *YOU?*

I DUNNO...LEMME SEE...FOR BOOSTING YOUR CIRCULATION WITH ALL THE PICTURES I SOLD YOU, FOR STARTERS. THEN THERE'S SAVING YOUR SON...

...OR SAVING YOU...OR SAVING THE WORLD...

HOW ABOUT YOUR UNCLE AND AUNT? OR GEORGE STACY AND HIS DAUGHTER?

HOW'D SAVING *THEM* WORK OUT FOR YOU?

I'M...

...SORRY.

YEAH, RIGHT.

NO, THAT WAS...*UNCALLED* FOR.

UNCALLED FOR? UNCALL--?

ARE YOU *SERIOUS?!?* ARE YOU FREAKING *KIDDING* ME?

ARE YOU TELLING ME YOU ACTUALLY HAVE A *BOUNDARY* BETWEEN WHAT'S UNCALLED FOR AND WHAT *ISN'T?*

IF THIS IS ABOUT MY EDITORIALS, YOU BROUGHT THOSE ON YOURSELF!

BULL! *YOU* BROUGHT THEM ON ME! YOU WERE VICIOUS, BERATING, NASTY...

MAYBE *YOU* JUST DIDN'T LIKE THE *TRUTH!*

MAYBE *YOU* JUST HAD AN EASIER TIME *HATING* ME WHEN YOU DIDN'T KNOW WHO I REALLY *WAS!*

MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT!!

WELL, *HALLELUJAH!* J. JONAH JAMESON ADMITS SPIDER-MAN MAY BE RIGHT ABOUT SOMETHING! STOP THE PRESSES!

YOU CAN DO THAT 'CAUSE YOU *OWN* 'EM, RIGHT?

YOU STILL HAVEN'T ANSWERED MY QUESTION, JONAH. WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

TO PUT IT ANOTHER WAY: WHAT'S IT GONNA TAKE TO GET ROBBIE REHIRED? TO END THE LAWSUIT?

IT'S NOT LIKE I HAVE ANY MONEY FOR YOU TO TAKE. SO--

TELL YOU WHAT, "HERO." I'LL MAKE A DEAL WITH YOU.

EITHER I'LL DROP THE LAWSUIT AGAINST YOU *OR* REHIRE ROBBIE. YOU GET TO CHOOSE.

TAKE YOUR TIME. GIVE IT ALL THE THOUGHT YOU--

DROP THE LAWSUIT.

REALLY?

REALLY.

I KNEW IT! I *KNEW* IT!

FOR ALL THAT YOU PRETEND TO BE A HERO...

...FOR ALL YOUR POSTURING AND SUPPOSED UNSELFISHNESS...

...WHEN IT =OOOF= COMES TO YOUR OWN WELFARE...

...YOU'LL SELL ROBBIE OUT IN A HEARTBEAT FOR YOUR OWN PERSONAL GAIN!

AND YOU "KNEW IT?"

DAMNED *RIGHT* I DID.

WHY'D YOU LOOK SO *SURPRISED*, THEN?

I SAW YOUR REACTION. YOU DIDN'T EXPECT ME TO SAY WHAT I DID.

I WAS JUST SURPRISED THAT YOU WERE WILLING TO *ADMIT* TO IT, THAT'S ALL.

SURE, SURE.

JONAH...I'M *NOT* STUPID. THE REASON I CHOSE THE LAWSUIT IS BECAUSE I KNOW YOU HAVE NO INTENTION OF KEEPING ROBBIE UNEMPLOYED.

BECAUSE WHAT YOU *REALLY* KNOW IS THAT I *AM* THAT UNSELFISH.

OH, DON'T I?

NO. YOU FIRED HIM IN ORDER TO PROVOKE EXACTLY THIS: A FACE-TO-FACE WITH ME.

SO IT WORKED. YOU GOT WHAT YOU WANTED.

SO SAY WHAT YOU *WANT* TO SAY.

LET'S PRETEND, FOR THE SAKE OF ARGUMENT...

OH, JOY. I LOVE ARGUMENTS.

...LET'S PRETEND THAT'S *WHY* I DID IT, AND WHAT I *WANTED*.

BUT NOW...?

MAYBE NOW I REALIZE THAT THERE ARE *NO* WORDS...WHICH IS A DAMNING ADMISSION FOR A WRITER TO MAKE.

ROBBIE STAYS FIRED, AND I'LL SEE YOU IN COURT, PARKER. OR IN JAIL. OR IN HELL.

WHEREVER!

HIT ME.

EXCUSE ME?

C'MON...LAY ONE ON ME. HECK, LAY A BUNCH.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

IT'S WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO, RIGHT?

WHEN I WAS LITTLE, AND THE KIDS WOULD PICK ON ME...BEAT ME UP, CALL ME "SCIENCE NERD" AND "PANTYWAIST"... MY AUNT AND UNCLE, THEY'D SAY...

"DON'T LET IT *BOTHER* YOU, PETER. THEY'RE JUST *JEALOUS.*"

AND THAT'S WHAT *YOUR* DEAL IS, TOO, ISN'T IT.

YOU'RE JEALOUS. JEALOUS OF MY POWER, AND THAT I USE IT TO HELP OTHERS.

THAT'S NOT TRUE.

YOU KNOW IT *IS.* BUT AT LEAST THE SCHOOLYARD BULLIES HAD THE COURAGE OF THEIR CONVICTIONS TO WHALE AWAY ON ME.

COME ON, JONAH.

GET IT OUT OF YOUR *SYSTEM,* ONCE AND FOR ALL.

HIT ME.

SURE. RIGHT. GIVE YOU THE EXCUSE TO POUND ME INTO OBLIVION.

YOU THINK I NEED AN *EXCUSE?*

I'M AN *OUTLAW!* YOU THINK ADDING ASSAULT AND BATTERY TO THE CHARGES IS GOING TO MATTER?

HELL, I COULD DROP YOU OFF THE TOP OF THE CHRYSLER BUILDING AND THEY'D *NEVER* TRACE IT TO ME. *SUSPECT,* MAYBE, BUT PROOF? NO WAY.

THIS IS ABSURD...

I WON'T *STOP* YOU. WON'T HIT YOU *BACK.* FREE SHOTS. AS *MANY* AS YOU WANT.

WE'RE NOT JUVENILES, THIS IS NOT A--

COME ON, JONAH! HERE I'M GIVING YOU A PASS TO GET OUT ALL YOUR ANGER, ALL YOUR JEALOUSY, ALL YOUR FEELING HUMILIATED BECAUSE I WAS SELLING YOU PICTURES OF MYSELF...

...AND YOU'RE TOO GUTLESS TO DO IT!

I'M NOT *GUTLESS!*

BULL.

SMAK

GET AWAY FROM ME!

GUTLESS WONDER! YOU'VE GOT NO PROBLEM SENDING ROBOTS AND HOME-GROWN SUPER-VILLAINS AFTER ME, BUT YOU WON'T GET YOUR *OWN* HANDS DIRTY...

I'LL LET THEM KNOW, JONAH. TRUST ME, I'LL LET ALL OF THEM KNOW.

I SAID, *GET AWAY!*

DOES YOUR SON KNOW HOW GUTLESS YOU ARE?

HOW ABOUT YOUR WIFE?

LET THEM KNOW THAT THE BRAVE, CRUSADING "*DAILY BUGLE*" PUBLISHER IS JUST A GUTLESS, CRAVEN, SPINELESS, LIMP--

SHUT UP!!!

WHAT ARE YOU, *KIDDING* ME?

IS THAT THE BEST YOU CAN--?

I SAID SHUT UP! SHUT YOUR LYING MOUTH!

SHUT UP!!!

"I LOST TRACK OF HOW LONG I JUST KEPT *HITTING* HIM, ROBBIE.

"HE NEVER FELL. NOT ONCE. DIDN'T EVEN COME CLOSE.

"HE WAS LIKE ONE OF THOSE BOP 'EM BAGS YOU HAVE AS A KID.

"AND THE WHOLE TIME... IT WAS THE SICKEST THING... HE JUST KEPT *SMILING.*

"AND FINALLY...WHEN MY FIST WAS THROBBING AND SKINNED NEAR TO THE BONE, HE SAID..."

WE DONE?

=Hunffff=
=Hunffff=

Yeah. We're done.

GOOD.

GOT A *PRESENT* FOR YOU.

"*PRESENT?*" WHAT KIND OF TRICK IS--?

MY FINAL "*SELF-PORTRAITS.*"

MY CAMERA RECORDED THE ENTIRE THING. THAT'S WHY I UNMASKED...SO EVERYONE WOULD KNOW IT'S ME.

RUN THEM ON THE FRONT PAGE. "*SPIDER-MAN TOO AFRAID TO LIFT HAND AGAINST CRUSADING BUGLE EDITOR.*"

YOU'LL SELL A *GAZILLION* COPIES. MAKE WAY MORE MONEY THAN THE LAWSUIT WOULD'VE GIVEN YOU.

GOOD-BYE, JONAH.

PARKER?

PARKER, *WAIT*. LET'S TALK ABOUT THIS.

PARKER...?

PETER?

Pete?

DAILY BUGLE

WHAT'S THAT, MR. JAMESON?

WHAT DOES IT *LOOK* LIKE, YOU MORON?

UH...FILM. BUT WHY'S IT ON THE FLOOR?

CIVIL WAR

MAKES IT EASIER TO DO *THIS*.

KRUNCH

CLEAN THAT UP. THEN LET'S FIGURE OUT WHAT WE'RE PUTTING ON THE FRONT PAGE FOR THE--

WHAM

WOMEN

OH MY *GOD!* JONAH! I...I'M SO *SORRY!*

I'd fire you if I could remember who you were...

YOU...REALLY *DID* WALK INTO A DOOR?

YEAH. I REALLY DID.

AND YOU HURT YOUR HAND...HITTING SPIDER-MAN.

YES.

NOW HOW ABOUT ASKING THE QUESTION YOU REALLY WANT THE ANSWER TO.

OKAY: WHY DID YOU DESTROY THE FILM?

GOD AS MY WITNESS, ROBBIE... I HAVE *NO* IDEA.

I THINK I DO.

YOU KNEW HE WAS USING YOU.

USING ME?

HE'S IN TURMOIL, JONAH. HIS LIFE HAS FALLEN APART. HE FEELS COMPLETELY RESPONSIBLE.

HE MAY NOT HAVE BEEN THINKING ABOUT IT CONSCIOUSLY...BUT UNCONSCIOUSLY...

HE WANTED TO BE *PUNISHED.* FOR EVERY DECISION HE EVER MADE THAT BROUGHT DEATH, DESTRUCTION AND CHAOS TO HIS LOVED ONES.

AS MUCH AS YOU PUMMELED HIM...IT'S PROBABLY A FRACTION OF WHAT HE THINKS HE *DESERVES.*

YOU'RE SAYING I DON'T MIND TEARING HIM DOWN, HUMILIATING HIM...

...BUT I JUST DON'T WANT HIS HELP TO DO IT.

PRETTY MUCH.

YOU DROPPING THE LAWSUIT?

MM-HMM.

AND WHAT ABOUT ME? WAS PETER RIGHT? FIRING ME WAS JUST A "SHOW" TO GET TO HIM?

MM-HMM.

JONAH...WHAT MAKES YOU THINK IT'S OKAY TO JUST... JUST USE PEOPLE LIKE THIS?

YEARS OF PRACTICE.

AND IF I SAY I DON'T FEEL LIKE COMING BACK?

THEN I SAY HOW MUCH I NEED YOU. HOW HAVING YOU AROUND GIVES ME SOMEONE TO ASPIRE TO BE LIKE.

AND IF *THAT* DOESN'T WORK?

WHY, THEN I JUST PLY YOU WITH MORE WI--

HUH?

THANKS FOR THE WINE. YOUR F.N.S.M.

-SIGH-

I *HATE* THAT F.N. SPIDER-MAN.

NEXT: ONE MORE DAY

Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man Annual #1

Certain days in your life...certain moments...it's like you have snapshots in your head.

That day, down at the Coney Island beach...that was one of those days.

Probably 'cause my mom hardly ever took me to the beach. Hardly ever took me anywhere, really.

She busted her butt cleaning other people's houses for peanuts.

Did everything she could to hold it together after Dad bolted.

Sometimes I like to imagine he was on the beach with us that day.

But he wasn't.

MOM! MOM! YOU GOTTA SEE IT! YOU...

MOM...?

No, she weren't *DEAD* or nothin' like that. My childhood sucked, but let's not make it even worse than it was.

She was just, y'know... dead to the world.

She tended to drink a lot in those days. A lot.

Since I knew I'd never be able to wake her, I curled up *NEXT* to her to wait.

BILLY. BILLY, WAKE UP. IT'S CLOUDING UP. TIME TO GO.

I WAS DREAMIN', MOM.

GOOD DREAMS?

I THINK SO, YEAH.

OH, SO THE SANDMAN CAME TO VISIT YOU? THAT'S NICE.

SAND...?

OH RIGHT! SAND! I GOTTA SHOW YOU!

WILLIAM, I TOLD YOU, WE REALLY HAVE TO...

PLEASE! *PLEASE!* I BUILT THIS *SANDCASTLE!* YOU GOTTA--

I kept wheedling her and begging and pleading and finally she sighed in that way she had and ran after me as best she could.

OH.

OH DEAR.

IT WAS *BEAUTIFUL.* IT WAS...IT WAS THE BEST CASTLE EVER. IT WAS LIKE... ART.

AW NO!

BILLY? BILLY, WHAT'S...?

WELL...THAT'S PRETTY MUCH THE WAY OF THE WORLD, HONEY.

NOTHING LASTS. NOT ART. NOT RELATIONSHIPS. *NOTHING*.

EVERYTHING GOES AWAY, SOONER OR LATER.

My mom ran off to get our stuff as the rain started to come down.

She told me not to go nowhere.

Now that I *THINK* about it... that's pretty much the story of my life.

Me going nowhere fast.

Other kids...they would've just shrugged that day off. Not me. I thought about what she said...and about this castle that I could still see so clear in my mind...

And I thought, "Screw that. I'm gonna find a way.

"I'm gonna find a way to make something that lasts. Something that people'll look at or see or remember forever, until the sun goes kablooey and nothin' matters no more.

"Somethin' that won't be washed away by the sands of time."

UH-OH.

Life is a wheel. No matter how much it turns and turns, and you keep thinking you're making some headway...

...sooner or later, it comes right around again.

In my case, it always brings me back around to him...

...to Spider-Man.

That miserable wall-crawler. Spending his life hiding behind a mask.

I may be a crook... but at least I'm an *HONEST* crook.

Sure, sure, I've had different names... William Baker, Flint Marko, others...

But, bottom line, my face is out there. When guys are throwing down with me, they know who they're dealing with...

The Sandman.

WONDER WHEEL

SCOOTER

THAT'S VERY GOOD, WILLIAM. VERY GOOD.

IN FACT, I THINK IT'S YOUR *BEST* SCULPTURE YET.

THANKS, MISS FLINT.

AND THAT'S SAYING SOMETHING, CONSIDERING YOUR PREVIOUS WORK.

YOU'RE GETTING QUITE A *REPUTATION* AROUND HERE.

I'M JUST TRYING TO...Y'KNOW...MAKE WHAT I SEE IN MY HEAD.

IT'S NO EASY TASK.

WHEN YOU'RE A RICH, FAMOUS SCULPTOR, YOU *WILL* REMEMBER ME, RIGHT?

ALWAYS.

THAT'S, UH...THAT'S A PRETTY RING. IS IT NEW?

WHY, YES. MY BOYFRIEND... WELL, MY FIANCÉ NOW...GAVE IT TO ME.

FEE-YANCY? LIKE... MARRIED?

YES, THAT'S RIGHT.

IS, UH... IS HE, Y'KNOW...A TEACHER, TOO?
NO. NO, HE'S A STOCKBROKER.
DOES HE MAKE A LOT OF MONEY?
OH YES, QUITE A LOT OF--
WHAT AN *ODD* THING TO ASK, WILLIAM.
Not to me. To me, it just proved what I always figured...
The guys with all the money get all the girls. Especially the pretty ones.
I WAS JUST ASKIN'. DIDN'T *MEAN* NOTHING BY IT.
I'M SURE YOU DIDN'T.
I HAVE TO HEAD DOWN TO LUNCHROOM DUTY. COME DOWN FOR LUNCH AS SOON AS YOU'VE CLEANED UP.
YEAH, OKAY. I WILL.
BY THE WAY, THAT'S A *LOVELY* SAND-IN-A-BOTTLE DESIGN YOU BROUGHT IN TODAY.
I didn't even have the nerve to tell her the bottle was for her...a present from a hopeless suitor. Looking back, it was one of those moments that's part of growing up...
...but when it's happening, it's like being in the bottom of a pit.
Worst thing about being in a pit is that sometimes people come along and kick more dirt down on you to bury you.
OH, LOOK. THE BIG ARTIST IS BUMMED OUT.

WHATTAYA WANT, VIC?

JUST WANTED T'SEE THE PANTYWAIST AND HIS PRETTY STATUES.

I'M *NOT* A PANTYWAIST.

OWWWW!

DON'T GET'CHER PANTIES IN A *BUNCH*, PANTYWAIST.

There was no reason for it. Then again... I was weak and they were strong.

For some people...

...that's all the reason they need.

NO!!!

When you're stuck out in the rain, the worst part is getting soaked. After that, you hardly feel it 'cause you're as wet as you're gonna get.

Same thing with getting pounded on. After it starts, you reach a point where you're not feelin' it no more.

At least for a while.

OH MY GOD...OH MY GOD...

HOW COULD THE SCHOOL NOT HAVE *CALLED* ME?

I snud out...

YOU SNUCK OUT?

...uh-huh... didn't wanna be seen lydis...

Areyoo *mad* cause I snud out?

NO, I'M NOT MAD. NOT AT YOU.

Denhoo?

AT...AT MYSELF...

Whadyoo do, Ma?

I...

IF I...IF I'D BEEN A BETTER WIFE...NOT DRUNK SO DAMN MUCH...

MAYBE YOUR DAD WOULDN'T HAVE *LEFT* US...

AND...AND YOU'D HAVE SOMEONE WHO COULD TEACH YOU TO DEFEND YOURSELF...

...TO BE A *MAN*...INSTEAD OF...

I AM A MAN. AND I CAN DEFEND *MYSELF.*

YOU'LL SEE.

THEY'LL *ALL* SEE.

The *BEACH*. It always came back around to the beach.

And, of course, Spider-Man, like I said. So I guess that throw-down at the beach...

...it was pretty much inevitable.

Pick a number, spin the wheel, take your chances!

Go for broke!

You gotta be in it to win it!

WONDER WHEEL

What goes around...

WONDER WHEEL

...comes around.

By that age, I pretty much came and went to the beach whenever I felt like it. Ma was too busy either working or drinking to notice.

I went from watching the way the water swirled in the sand...to how it worked with people in it. And what I saw...

...was that the people who just stood there and took it got knocked on their butts...

...while the ones who went with the flow weren't hurt at all.

I built more sand castles and watched the rising tide run over them...

And saw how the sand changed shape, moving with the water.

I watched it for a ***REAL*** long time.

Then I spent the next month, every spare moment, practicing moving like sand and water.

And the next time Vic and his buddies tried something, all I kept thinking was, "You can't touch me.

"You can't hurt me.

"Every time you think you have your hands on me...

"I slip through your fingers, like water.

"Like sand."

THUMP

THUMP

I learned several major things about power that day.

I learned that guys *RESPECT* and *FEAR* it.

That girls are *ATTRACTED* to it.

They just want to show you who's boss.

And that those who have power over you...whether they're principals or cops... don't give a damn about what's right or wrong, just or unjust.

I spent my whole life being good...and kids beat me up for it.

When I stood up for myself, the people with real power slapped me down. And I realized why:

I'd become a threat. And I also realized...

I liked the feeling...

A LOT.

Things changed after that.

The principal, the teachers... they may have been bosses of the school...

...but I was the boss of the kids.

As for Vic and his pals...

...they learned fast that it was smarter to go with the wave than try to stand up to it. And that lesson stuck...

...all the way into high school.

It was like my mind reshaped my body. I got big...threatening...

I stopped going by "*William.*" When I started high school, I had a new name:

Flint.

It sounded tough...imposing... and best of all...

It reminded me of her... and the guy I never wanted to go back to being.

Thing is, I still had a boatload of anger churning in my gut. Fortunately, I figured out someplace to put it.

OOOOF!!!

UNHHHH!!!!

Kick the crap out of people in the hallway, you get suspended... detention...expelled.

But kick the crap out of people on a football field...

...and the world trips over its feet throwing itself at you.

BAM BAM

WHAT THE HELL?

VIC? JEEZ...HOW'D YOU KNOW I'D BE *HERE?*

'CAUSE THIS IS THE SLEAZY MOTEL YOU *ALWAYS* USE. LOOK, IT'S FREEZING OUT HERE, FLINT. CAN I COME IN?

NO WAY. MARCY'S NAKED AND EVERYTHING.

THEN COME OUT HERE. I'M IN *DEEP*, MAN. I NEED YOUR HELP.

OKAY, OKAY, GIMME A SEC...

SO LOOK, UH...I GOT SOME GAMBLING DEBTS.

WHAT *ELSE* IS NEW?

WHAT'S NEW IS THAT SOME GUYS ARE GONNA KILL ME IF I DON'T PAY UP.

AW, C'MON, VIC...

I'M NOT SCREWIN' AROUND, FLINT. THESE GUYS... THEY'RE MOB TYPES.

JEEZ, VIC, WHAT'RE YOU DOING IN WITH THE MOB?

IT'S WHERE THE MONEY IS.

OF ALL THE...

FLINT, I NEED YOU TO THROW THE NEXT COUPLE OF GAMES.

WHAT?

WE'RE HEAVILY FAVORED TO WIN. IF WE LOSE, THE GUYS I OWE MONEY TO CAN CLEAN UP...

MOB GUYS BET ON *HIGH SCHOOL* GAMES?

THEY'LL BET ON HOW FAST PAINT DRIES! C'MON...

NO WAY, VIC. NO FREAKIN'--

THEN I'M DEAD! I *MEAN* IT! REALLY, HONEST TO GOD DEAD!

THEY'LL BE FINDING PIECES OF ME IN THE HUDSON FOR MONTHS! FLINT--

FLINT...MY MA...I'M ALL SHE'S *GOT*. THEY KILL ME, SHE'S...

I'M BEGGIN' YA, MAN. PLEASE.

What could I do? The guy was on his last legs.

We were talking a guy's life next to a couple of football games.

So I did it. I played for crap deliberately. I figured no one would figure it out.

YOU'RE PLAYING FOR CRAP *DELIBERATELY!* WHAT, DID YOU THINK I WOULDN'T FIGURE IT OUT!?

YOU'RE OFF THE TEAM! IN FACT, IF I HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY, YOU'RE OUT OF SCHOOL!

BUT...

YOU'VE GOT *MONEY* RIDING ON THE GAME, DON'T YOU!

NO!

YOU...YOU CAN'T! THAT'S NOT FAIR--!

I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO MAKE A MARK ON THIS WORLD!

BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO ACCOMPLISH A DAMNED *THING!* YOU'LL NEVER MAKE YOUR MARK! *NEVER!*

YOU WANT A *MARK?*

HERE'S YOUR MARK!

ARRRHHH!!

From that point on, I was pretty much screwed.

My world was spinning out of control...

WUMP WUMP WUMP

...and sometimes you're holding on for all you're worth...

...but the world just doesn't cut you a break.

And no matter how good you are at landing on your feet...

...you wind up on your backside.

I remember the first time that I saw him, after all those years.

He'd seemed so much *BIGGER* to me in the old days.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. I didn't see him *RIGHT AWAY*. First I had to get myself in even deeper than I already was.

Vic and I got resourceful in getting money together as quick as we could with the intention of both of us blowing town...

Unfortunately, it didn't work out as planned.

Then again, why should that be different from any *OTHER* part of my life?

Aggravated assault and battery. Three counts of theft.

They expected me to roll over on Vic, but I *DIDN'T*, which didn't earn me any points with the D.A.

Wound up in the slammer...for the first time, but not the last.

That's where I saw him... the guy I was talking about just before. The guy who used to seem a lot bigger to me.

Bet you thought I was talking about Spider-Man. Nah. He came ***LATER.*** No, I was talking about...

...my dad. Floyd Baker.

I recognized him in a ***SECOND,*** of course.

HAH! ***TOO SLOW,*** OLD MAN!

YOU GOTTA LEARN TO--

WAM

HERE Y'GO.

WHAT, Y'THINK I NEEDED YER HELP? THINK I'M TOO WEAK TO FIGHT MY *OWN* FIGHTS?

I...NO, I...

YOU GOT A HELLUVA PUNCH, THOUGH. I'LL GIVE YA *THAT*.

NOT AFRAID TO MIX IT UP, ARE YA?

I'LL TELL YA, IF MY NOTHING KID HAD A *FRACTION* OF YER GUTS, I'D PROBABLY NEVER HAVE LEFT HOME.

NOPE. NOT ME.

My God...no matter how many times I run that moment through my mind, it still makes me want to puke.

He stood there, saying, "*I'm Floyd Baker,*" and all I could think about was the coach saying I'd never make a mark on the world.

MARK...O.

FLINT MARKO.

I was in and out of the slammer over the next few years. Every time I got out, my best friend and my best girl would be waiting for me.

And Vic, he always had some new plan, some new scheme.

The mob had let him work off his debt, and it turned out to be to our benefit. We did some enforcement jobs. And most of his other schemes, they worked great.

But when they went wrong, somehow *I* always wound up with the *FUZZY* end of the lollipop.

Still, what made jail bearable was that I spent time with my dad...although he still had no clue who I was.

And then, one day, I was in...but he was out. Free.

I wanted to be with him more than anything.

So I *DID* something about it.

You probably heard about what happened next. About how they kept after me, and I fled all the way down to Georgia...

...and I went to ground... literally.

Then a nearby nuclear reactor detonated...

...radioactive waste spilled into the sand...

And one billion-to-one chance later...

There I was.

I made my way back to New York and went straight to Marcy's apartment to tell her that the rough days were over...

...'cause thanks to the accident, nothing could stop me again.

Nothing, of course...

...except betrayal.

F-FLINT!

HOLY GEEZ.

I...I THOUGHT YOU...

It was like my whole life had been a *HAZE* and only snapped into focus at that moment. Vic and Marcy had obviously been together the whole time...setting me up...

Laughing at me.

The man I was would have *KILLED* them. Damned well nearly *DID*.

But the man I had *BECOME*... the Sandman...

...decided they weren't worth the effort.

For what I had *BECOME*...they were too *LITTLE* to matter.

I needed enemies who were *GOOD ENOUGH* for me.

And I *FOUND* one.

Yeah, sure, he thought he beat me the first time I met him, using a vacuum cleaner to suck me in.

As if *THAT* would have held me. As if I couldn't have sent my body crashing out in a hundred directions at once and shredded it like a tin can.

Instead I went *ALONG* with it, because, see, I'd heard that my father got nailed again and had been sent up the river.

Which is where they sent me, just like I *FIGURED* they would.

Spider-Man didn't beat me. Not really.

He just gave me a free ticket to where I wanted to go.

I had a hideout in Coney Island... overlooking the beach, of course.

IT'S JUST ANOTHER COUPLE BLOCKS UP.

I DON'T GET IT, FLINT. WHY ME? WHY'D YOU GO TO ALL THIS TROUBLE T'BREAK ME OUT?

ACTUALLY... IT'S 'CAUSE...

HOLD IT, SANDY! HERE YOU ARE ON *BOARDWALK*, BUT I DON'T SEE YOUR "*GET OUT OF JAIL FREE*" CARD.

OH, YOU GOTTA BE *KIDDIN'* ME!

WHAT, DID YOU SWING AROUND THE WHOLE FREAKIN' CITY LOOKING FOR ME?

YUP. THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT.

PETER! PETER, WHERE ***ARE*** YOU?! IT'S THAT AWFUL SPIDER-MAN!

SAKES ALIVE! A PERSON CAN'T EVEN GO OUT FOR NATHAN'S HOT DOGS ANYMORE IN THIS CITY WITHOUT *TROUBLE* STARTING!

GREAT. WHAT ELSE COULD GO WRONG?

NOTHIN'! 'CAUSE I'M *ENDING* THIS *RIGHT NOW!*

SORRY, SANDY! *CLOSE*, BUT YOU'LL *NEVER* WIN A STUFFED POODLE *THAT* WAY!

I always loved that movie, "*On the Waterfront.*" Brando has that great speech toward the end...

"*I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody...*

"*...instead of a bum, which is what I am.*" And he's blaming his brother for everything.

'Cause his brother sold him out as a boxer, and he figures his brother should've been watching out for him.

My life might've been different if my dad had been watching out for me.

But he never did.

Not ever.

WATCH OUT!!!!

In the end...just like always...my dad was too far away.

I couldn't stop it in time...couldn't even look. I'd screwed everything up. ***EVERYTHING.***

And just when I thought I could fix it... along came a spider.

And I went berserk.

I used the sand on the beach to grow and keep on growing.

The rain started coming down harder, and Spider-Man, he tried to stay one step ahead of me.

Took refuge on the Ferris wheel. Fell off.

And I knew I had him.

It was getting harder to hold myself together in the pounding rain. But I had to do it for just long enough...long enough to finish him...

My whole life came down to that moment. A life of just trying to make a difference... to help people...to get respect...

And none of it seemed to matter. None of it.

And I screamed, "Why? Why me? Why can't anything I do matter?"

And I got my answer from on high...

"Because somebody up there hates you."

UNFFFFFF...

YOU...OKAY, MISTER?

I...I THINK SO...WHAT THE HELL *HAPPENED*...?

I WAS AT THE WRONG ANGLE TO SNAG THE CAR...SO I WHIPPED UP A WEB CUSHION IN ABOUT TWO SECONDS...

THANK GOD IT WAS ENOUGH.

WHY WERE YOU WITH HIM?

WITH HIM? OH...NO. NO, HE JUST, UH, WAS ASKING DIRECTIONS. TO A BAR. WHERE'D HE GO, ANYWAY?

HE MADE HIMSELF INTO A GIANT FROM THE BEACH SAND, THEN GOT HIT BY LIGHTNING. AND SINCE BEACH SAND IS MOSTLY SILICON, IT CONDUCTED IT AND BLEW HIM TO PIECES.

COME ON, SERIOUSLY. WHERE'D HE GO?

HE RAN OFF.

YEAH, I FIGURED. LOOK, UH...I GOTTA GO...

ARE YOU *SURE* YOU HAD NO IDEA WHO HE WAS?

NOPE. HE WAS JUST, Y'KNOW...SOME *NOBODY*.

SOME GOOD FOR NOTHIN' BUM.

You try to make your mark in this world. To do something that will last...that will tell everybody who comes after you, "I was here."

To make a statement for the ages.

Took me a while to find my statement. To figure out what I could do that would make the world stop and take notice.

I would create a lasting piece of real-life art...

...something that the world would remember, no matter how long it took me to finish it. I would call it:

"The Death of Spider-Man."

It would be my masterpiece.

It would be glorious...and best of all...

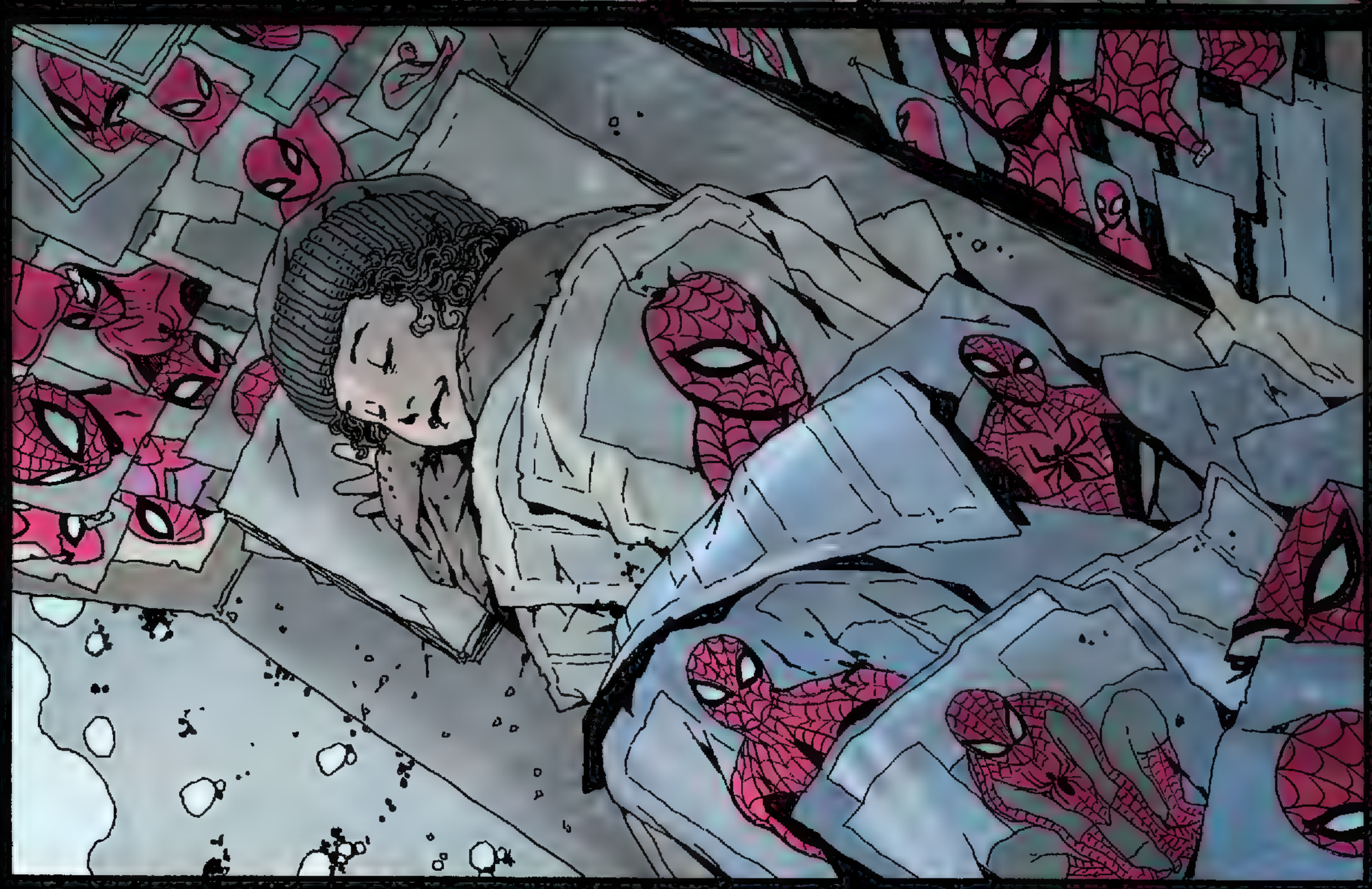
...it would last forever.

END

DAILY BUGLE
Spider-Man in Shocking Battle!

KOFF
KOFF

Leah



"...LIVER FAILED, AND THE KIDNEYS FOLLOWED..."

I'M SORRY..THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO EXCEPT MAKE HER COMFORTABLE AND WAIT FOR THE END.

SHE WAS ALREADY UNCONSCIOUS WHEN I CAME ACROSS HER...GOD..I MUST'VE SWUNG PAST THAT ALLEY A ***HUNDRED*** TIMES... MAYBE IF I'D NOTICED HER SOONER...

SHE HAD NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS OF ME...TONS...

OBVIOUSLY YOU MEANT SOMETHING TO HER, BUT EVEN YOU CAN'T BE EVERYWHERE.

DO WE EVEN KNOW HER NAME?

SHE HAD A NECKLACE TUCKED UNDER HER SHIRT. IT SAID "LEAH" ON IT.

IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, LEAH...SWEET DREAMS.

"SWEET, SWEET DREAMS."

End

Amazing Spider-Man #539
Cover Pencils by Ron Garney

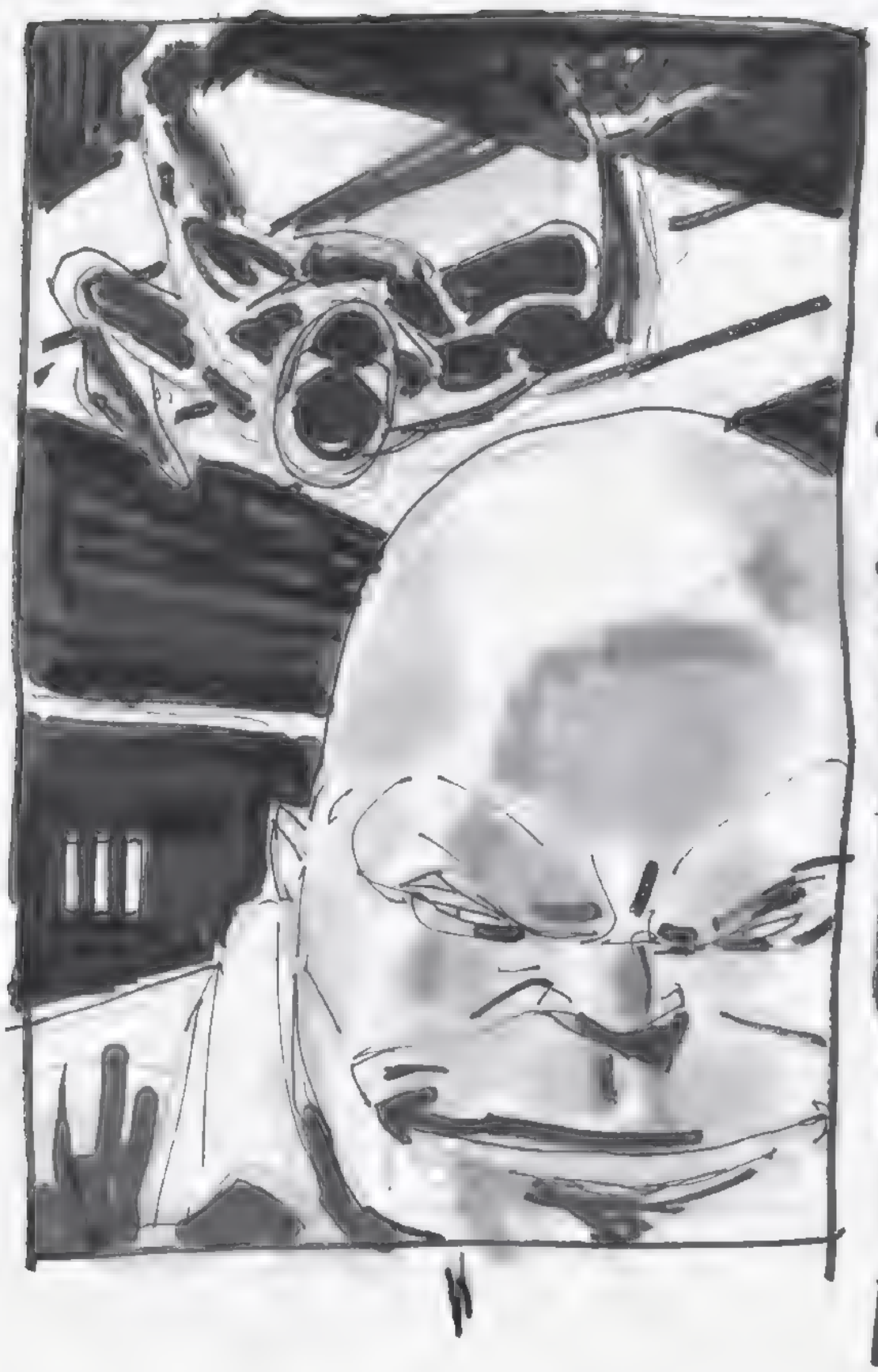
Amazing Spider-Man #540
Cover Pencils by Ron Garney
FedEx
AMBULANCE

Amazing Spider-Man #541
Cover Pencils by Ron Garney

Amazing Spider-Man #542
Cover Pencils by Ron Garney

Amazing Spider-Man #543
Cover Pencils by Ron Garney

Amazing Spider-Man #542 Cover Concepts by Ron Garney



2

3

SPIDEY NEEDS TO BE BIGGER HERE

Amazing Spider-Man #543 Cover Concepts by Ron Garney

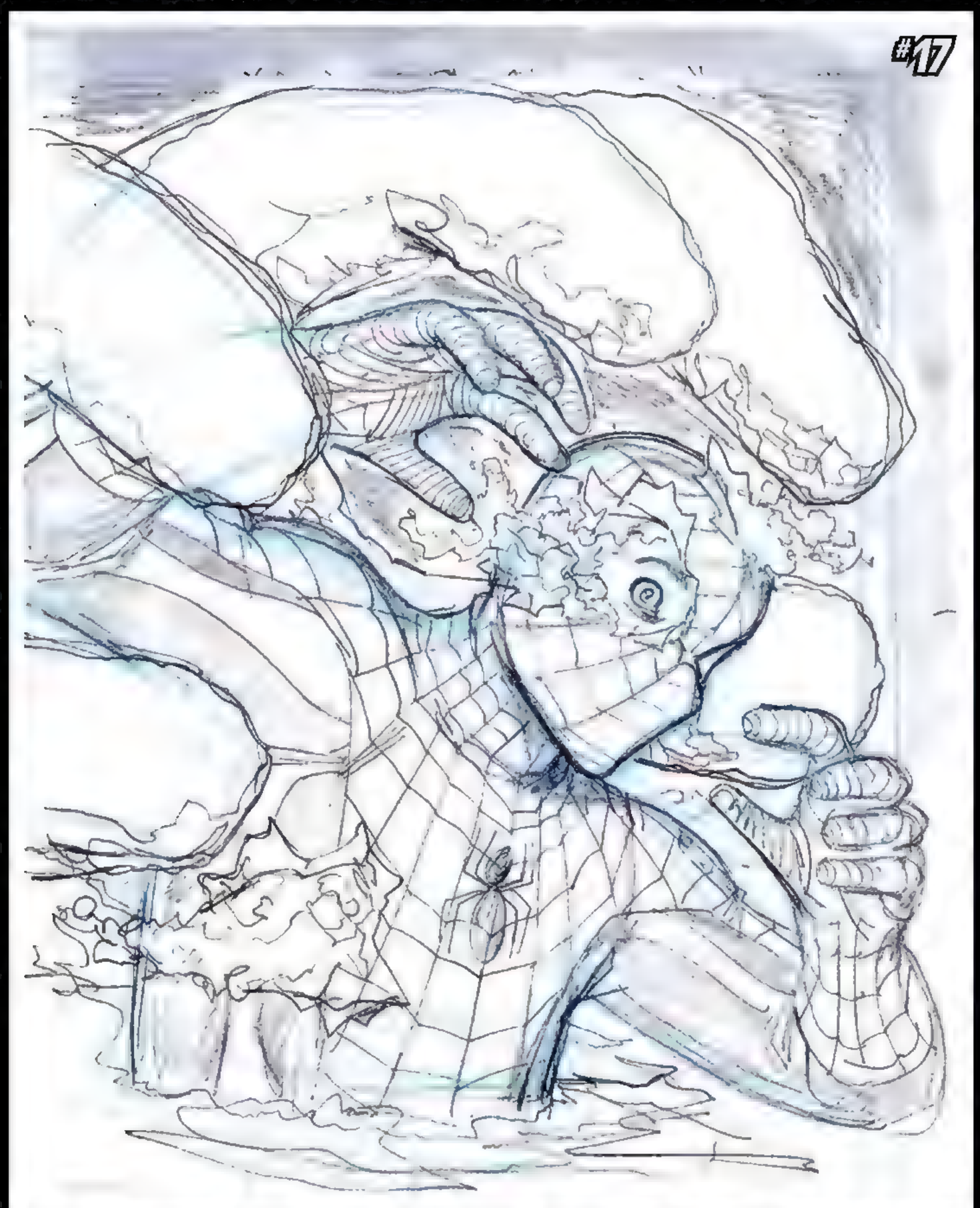
1

2

3

4

Unused *Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man* Cover Sketches by Mike Wieringo



Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man Cover Pencils by Mike Wieringo and Todd Nauck

#17

#20 (unused)

#21

#22

Unused Cover to
Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man #20
by Todd Nauck & Rob Stull

Spider-Man Poses by Todd Nauck

Todd Nauck
02.07

BLACK HEART. BLACK SOUL.
SPIDER-MAN IS BACK IN BLACK.

The Civil War has ended: One side has won, another has lost, and all the rules have changed. With Spider-Man's identity revealed to the world, he has exposed himself to the treachery of his oldest enemies. Peter Parker's life has been turned upside down — and along with it, the lives of his dearest friends and family members.

As this nightmare spins a treacherous web from which he cannot escape, Spider-Man embraces the darkness and finds he must make a stand — maybe his *last* stand — against some of his fiercest foes, including the Sandman, the mysterious "Other" and the deadly Kingpin.

Collecting *Amazing Spider-Man #539-543*, and *Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man #17-23* and *Annual #1*.

A MARVEL